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EDITORIAL COORDINATOR Nilufar Gordon
EDITORIAL COMMITTEE Caity Bolton, Ann Boyles, Roshan Danesh, Nilufar Gordon, Pierre-Yves Mocquais, Lev Rickards

French translation: Louise Mailhot and Juliette Goudreau
Spanish translation: Parviz Shahidinejad

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Many articles published in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* allude to the institutions and central figures of the Bahá'í Faith; as an aid for those unfamiliar with the Bahá'í Faith, we include here a succinct summary excerpted from http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/bahaullah-covenant/. The reader may also find it helpful to visit the official web site for the worldwide Bahá'í community (www.bahai.org) available in several languages. For article submission guidelines, please visit journal.bahaistudies.ca/online/about/submissions/.

About the Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith, its followers believe, is "divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men." The mission of the Bahá'í Faith is "to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, 'abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith'" (Shoghi Effendi).

The Bahá'í Faith began with the mission entrusted by God to two Divine Messengers—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Today, the distinctive unity of the Faith They founded stems from explicit instructions given by Bahá'u'lláh that have assured the continuity of guidance following His passing. This line of succession, referred to as the Covenant, went from Bahá'u'lláh to His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. A Bahá'í accepts the divine authority of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and of these appointed successors.

The Báb (1819-1850) is the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith. In the middle of the 19th century, He announced that He was the bearer of a message destined to transform humanity's spiritual life. His mission was to prepare the way for the coming of a second Messenger from God, greater than Himself, who would usher in an age of peace and justice.

Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892)—the "Glory of God"—is the Promised One foretold by the Báb and all of the Divine Messengers of the past. Bahá'u'lláh delivered a new Revelation from God to humanity. Thousands of verses, letters and books flowed from His pen. In His Writings, He outlined a framework for the development of a global civilization which takes into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life. For this, He endured torture and forty years of imprisonment and exile.

In His will, Bahá'u'lláh appointed His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), as the authorized interpreter of His teachings and Head of the Faith. Throughout the East and West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became known as an ambassador of peace, an exemplary human being, and the leading exponent of a new Faith.

Appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), spent 36 years systematically nurturing the development, deepening the understanding, and strengthening the unity of the Bahá'í community, as it increasingly grew to reflect the diversity of the entire human race.

The development of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide is today guided by the Universal House of Justice (established in 1963). In His book of laws, Bahá'u'lláh instructed the Universal House of Justice to exert a positive influence on the welfare of humankind, promote education, peace and global prosperity, and safeguard human honor and the position of religion.

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Michèle Jubilee "Grow through What You Go through," 2023, digital illustration.

From the Editor's Desk

MICHAEL SABET

If asked which human undertaking is most concerned with the soul, and which with the mind, most people would say that the soul is the province of religion, while the mind is an area of focus for philosophers (and, in the modern age, scientists). The Bahá'í writings disrupt this facile distinction, not only by grounding the ontology of the mind squarely in the spirit, but also by highlighting it as the preeminent feature of the human essence whose gradual perfection is the very purpose of religion:

> As for the mind, it is the power of the human spirit. The spirit is as the lamp, and the mind as the light that shines from it. The spirit is as the tree, and the mind as the fruit. The mind is the perfection of the spirit and a necessary attribute thereof, even as the rays of the sun are an essential requirement of the sun itself. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 55:6)

> This supreme emblem of God stands first in the order of creation and first in rank, taking precedence over all created things. Witness to it is the Holy Tradition, "Before all else, God created the mind." From the dawn of creation, it was made to be revealed in the temple of man. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 1).

Given the importance accorded to the concept of mind in the Bahá'í Faith, and the extensive reflection on it in philosophy, this is an area that demands the kind of work that the Guardian calls for in our nascent explorations of Bahá'í scholarship, in which those "who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance . . . correlate [the Faith's] beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world" (21 October 1943 letter to an individual believer, qtd. in *Compilation on Scholarship* no. 13).

In this issue of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, we are pleased to present two articles that approach the question of the nature of mind from different perspectives. In the first, "Mind, 'the Power of the Human Spirit,'" Gerald Filson engages with contemporary philosophy of mind, finding points of resonance with a Bahá'í understanding. Since Descartes, the nature of mind—and specifically whether it is fundamentally distinct from the matter that composes everything else, or somehow derivative of that matter and therefore bound by the same causal deterministic laws—has been a central question for philosophy. Relatively more recently, science has come to be seen as an important contributor to this discourse, with the establishment of neuroscience as a discipline in the twentieth century, and technological

advances in scientists' ability to investigate and measure structures and processes in the brain. Yet there remain properties of the mind—human thought and emotion, and will and purpose, as well as consciousness itself—that can be cogently argued not only to sit beyond the current limits of science's grasp, but to be categorically outside the reach of scientific inquiry. Subjective experience, which Filson argues to be holistically integral to all features and capacities of mind, may represent a *Sadratu'l-Muntahá*[1] for science. In addition to presenting the philosophical arguments for this position, this article explores a wide range of capacities of the mind, from language to scientific inquiry itself, as well as human pursuits such as art and religion that illuminate particular facets of the mind. It ultimately argues that not only can understanding the mind as an essentially spiritual entity help ground important philosophical positions on the nature of mind, but that it is in the very pursuit of a spiritually-informed, collaborative process of personal and social development that the mind may best achieve its potential as the agent of social progress.

In our second article, "The *Mizán* of Affect in Material versus Metaphysical Models of Human Consciousness," John Hatcher approaches the topic of mind from an experiential, poetic perspective, in order to consider some of the practical implications of a model in which the mind, and the self, are essentially spiritual. In particular, he explores implications for the understanding and treatment of the affective conditions that have become commonplace in our society. There are no easy answers for those of us who either live with depression, anxiety, and other affective conditions, or who are trying to learn how to support family or friends who do. We are fortunate to live in a time of ever greater awareness about these conditions and a concomitant reduction in the stigma historically attached to them; a time in which novel treatments and approaches to managing affective disorders are constantly being explored. Hatcher's goal in this paper is not to pronounce on the efficacy of these approaches—a matter for experts in the field to consider—but to provide a broader framework for thinking about the ultimate goals of any treatment in light of our spiritual reality. Rooted in the author's own personal mental health journey, the article is the fruit of hard-won insights into the relationship between mind and brain, external reality and internal emotional state. These insights are cast into the mold of the image of the *Mizán*, a set of balance scales that Hatcher uses to represent the brain. This article provides a beautiful example of the capacity of the Bahá'í writings to illuminate reality, when we cast into their ocean our experiences, of pain, joy, and all the other myriad dimensions of human life, and see how these become transformed in the waves.

1 "The Tree beyond which there is no passing;" see Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas note 128.

We are also pleased to be publishing reviews of two recent books: *The Life of Laura Barney* by Mona Khademi, reviewed by Jack McLean, and *The World of the Bahá'í Faith*, a volume edited by Robert Stockman. As the number of high-quality Bahá'í publications continues to grow, we invite both authors and potential reviewers to contact us with proposals for future reviews.

This issue features two poems by June Perkins that speak of longing—a capacity of mind that seems to demand description by a language other than that of science, as Filson argues. The cover art by Michèle Jubilee is titled "Grow through What You Go through;" you may want to look back at it, now and then, as you read Hatcher's reflections on the potential for a spiritual perspective to transform even the direst of experiences.

Feather Fin

JUNE PERKINS

The Tank

Featherfin leaps out of the water,
even though he is not meant for
carpet of forest patterns. He is
curious, even if it means his
death. He wants to know how
it is out there. Large hands of a tall
woman, cradle him back to the tank.
The memory of being without water
lingers & he longs now for the
the taste beyond carpet & water.

The House

The woman with the large
hands cradles the featherfin
with a severe case of tank blues, back
home, a tank filled with shipwrecks,
skulls & plants (some fake),
'silly fish' she says yet she too
longs for aromas beyond
windows, doors & house with
the splitting windows spilling into
light, sky, stars & a place to swim
with salmon.

You might also like to read...

As a service to our readers, we are including links to articles related to the subjects presented in this issue. These are articles that have been previously published in the *Journal* and are available for free on our website.

Depression, Stigma, and the Soul
by *Patricia McIlvride*
https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-27.1-2.4(2017)

Major depression is a global health crisis; it is complex and confusing, and the majority of people who need help do not receive it. New recovery models including those offered by interpersonal neurobiology are challenging the medical model in the treatment of mental illness. By defining the mind as transcendent and both embodied and relational, new avenues of healing become possible.

The Bahá'í Philosophy of Human Nature
by *Ian Kluge*
https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-27.1-2.3(2017)

Human Nature and Mental Health: A Bahá'í-inspired Perspective
by *Michael L. Penn*
https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-25.1-2.3(2015)

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief and generally accessible overview of one research-practitioner's understanding of the nature of mind from the perspective of the Bahá'í teachings and to explore some of the implications of this view for understanding mental health and mental illness.

Antinomies of Reason and the Theology of Revelation: Some Preliminary Thoughts
by *Nader Saiedi*
https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-8.4.3(1998)

Central to Bahá'í philosophy and theology is the doctrine of revelation. A thesis of Progressive Revelation offers a unique solution to the fundamental antinomies of philosophical discourse in general, Accordingly, Bahá'í theology of revelation should not be understood as an isolated or residual theological, philosophical, or sociological principle. The article tries to demonstrate the general and foundational significance of the concept of revelation by applying it to the central question of modern philosophy, i.e., Kantian antinomies of reason.

The Beauty of the Human Psyche: The Patterns of the Virtues
by *Rhett Diessner*
https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.4.7(2016)

Advancing in Bahá'í-inspired Education
by *Sona Farid-Arbab*
https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.4.5(2016)

Language and Worldview
by *Alvino Fantini*
https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-2.2.2(1989)

The Swimmer

JUNE PERKINS

Time threads me into you. Stars salt me with the blue.
I move in your curl. I shine alive smooth twirls
movements unfurl.

Time traps me in your silk. Stars sweet me with your song.
I peel your shadow, smooth your
edges move with care amongst oceans translucent
as emerald glass.

Butterfly fish threads me into net. Ocean salts me with your loss.
Time hooks me into blue.

The water is too still.

I leave the boat
dive in the smooth
pearl cut grass green wave. I submarine stalk
our storm. Were your promises
all talk?
        Now you sing calm.

I have learnt
the strokes   that will move me towards
                the Beloved's shore.

Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

GERALD FILSON

Abstract
This paper correlates Bahá’í concepts of the mind with insights from philosophy. It presents arguments from both sources for a non-reductive understanding of the human mind and argues that, although science can help us advance our understanding of the mind, it is not sufficient in this pursuit, as it cannot capture fully how the human mind experiences reality. The paper reviews the mind’s conceptual way of knowing, explores the implications of language for philosophy of mind, and considers how the pursuit of science and the phenomenon of religion both shed light on the capacities and nature of the mind. After suggesting that the process of learning in which the global Bahá’í community has embarked may serve as a model for engaging the human mind in a collective enterprise for the betterment of the world, it turns back to philosophy to submit that, while many contemporary philosophers persuasively argue that the human mind is not reducible to physical causality, the philosophical resistance to a spiritual dimension of the human mind is excessively limiting. The minds of human beings demonstrate capacities that lie beyond nature, and a conception of the mind as “the power of the human spirit” or “rational soul” can not only be a fruitful way of understanding the mind, but lead to an orientation by human beings in the world, demonstrated through the learning process discussed earlier in the paper, that holds promise for the future of humanity.

Résumé
Le présent article met en corrélation les concepts bahá’ís de la raison avec les perspectives de la philosophie. Il expose des arguments provenant des deux sources en vue d’une compréhension non réductrice de la raison humaine. Il fait valoir que même si la science peut nous aider à mieux comprendre la raison, elle n’est pas suffisante dans cette quête car elle ne peut pas saisir pleinement comment la raison humaine fait l’expérience de la réalité. L’auteur passe en revue le mode de connaissance conceptuelle de la raison, explore les implications du langage pour la philosophie de la raison et examine comment l’activité scientifique et le phénomène religieux permettent tous deux de nous éclairer sur les capacités et la nature de la raison. L’auteur avance que le processus d’apprentissage dans lequel est engagée la communauté mondiale bahá’íe peut servir de modèle pour faire intervenir la raison humaine dans une entreprise collective visant l’amélioration du monde. Il fait ensuite un retour à la philosophie et affirme que si plusieurs philosophes contemporains soutiennent de manière convaincante que la raison humaine ne se réduit pas à la causalité physique, la résistance des philosophes à l’idée d’une dimension spirituelle de la raison humaine est extrêmement limitative. La faculté de raisonnement des êtres humains démontre des capacités qui transcendent la nature, et une conception de la raison en tant que « pouvoir de l’esprit humain » ou « âme rationnelle » peut non seulement se révéler fructueuse pour comprendre la raison, mais elle peut aussi permettre aux êtres humains d’orienter le monde, comme l’a démontré le processus d’apprentissage discuté plus

haut dans l'article, et ainsi, se révéler prometteur pour l'avenir de l'humanité.

Resumen
Este artículo relaciona los conceptos Bahá'ís de la mente con pensamientos filosóficos. Presenta argumentos de ambas fuentes para un entendimiento no reduccionista de la mente humana y argumenta que, a pesar que la ciencia puede ayudarnos avanzar nuestra comprensión de la mente, no es suficiente en esta búsqueda, ya que no puede captar completamente como la mente humana experimenta la realidad. El artículo revisa la manera conceptual de la mente para conocer, explora las implicaciones del lenguaje para la filosofía de la mente, y considera como tanto la búsqueda de la ciencia como el fenómeno de la religión irradian luz sobre las capacidades y la naturaleza de la mente. Después de sugerir que el proceso de aprendizaje en el cual la comunidad mundial Bahá'í se ha embarcado podría servir como un modelo para involucrarse en un emprendimiento colectivo para el mejoramiento del mundo, vuelve a la filosofía para aceptar que, mientras muchos filósofos contemporáneos en forma persuasiva argumentan que la mente humana no se puede reducir a la causalidad física, la resistencia filosófica a una dimensión espiritual de la mente humana es excesivamente limitada. Las mentes de los seres humanos demuestran capacidades que yacen más allá de la naturaleza, y una concepción de la mente como "el poder del espíritu humano" o "el alma racional" puede no solo ser una manera fructífera para entender la mente, sino conduce a una orientación para los seres humanos en el mundo, demostrado por el proceso de aprendizaje discutido anteriormente en el artículo, lo cual es prometedor para el futuro de la humanidad.

Introduction

This paper is about the human mind, identified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as "the power of the human spirit" (*Some Answered Questions* 55:6).[1] I compare Bahá'í concepts with some insights from contemporary philosophy of mind that are similar to Bahá'í views. As with any philosophical question, there is a broad range of positions on the mind in philosophy, but my focus on points of similarity is deliberate. On the one hand, some of the more naturalistic or computational philosophical approaches to the mind, which resonate less with a Bahá'í understanding, are well represented by approaches to human consciousness that take animal consciousness or artificial intelligence as their models; these are explored in due course. On the other hand, and more fundamentally, the focus on similarity supports the goal of the paper, which is to assist readers to see how insights from philosophy and from the Bahá'í writings can complement each other, and contribute to discourse in this area.

The paper is structured around three interweaving strands of argument. In the first, to gain some idea of the nature of the mind, I explore helpful insights

1 The ideas in this paper grew out of a presentation to a colloquium on human nature organized by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) in December 2020. I am grateful to the ISGP and to Lydia LeMay, Ilya Shodjaee, Todd Smith, and Levin Zendeh for their helpful comments on the presentation which have been extended in this paper.

from philosophy that help to illuminate the insufficiency of reductive explanations of the mind that rely solely on physical or natural explanations, thereby implying (or stating explicitly) that the mind is a purely physical and natural phenomenon. I canvass philosophy that provides logical support for the Bahá'í view of the mind as a unique power that lies beyond physical explanations that aim to level the human mind to animal rationality, describe it as arising entirely out of the operations of the physical brain, or propose that artificial intelligence (AI) will reproduce the power of the human mind. These reductionist accounts stand at odds with our intuitive understanding of the mind, of course. After all, we don't say that neurons or physical dynamics in the brain read and write music, just as we don't say that feathers and wings fly. Birds fly, using these parts of their anatomy, and people compose music in their own minds by way of their conscious appreciations.[2] But philosophy can help us move beyond an intuitive sense that there must be something more to the human mind than these reductionist models suggest, and provide reasoned arguments for why, for example, despite the success of neuroscientific efforts in correlating brain activity with some features of consciousness, they fall short of demonstrating causality. More fundamentally, the reductionist accounts fail to provide an adequate qualitative description of consciousness itself; and while science may aspire to progressively "fill in the gaps" to create a complete picture of consciousness rooted in physical causality, philosophers have persuasively argued that an accurate description of consciousness requires a kind of knowledge that science simply cannot access.

The second strand of argument elaborates on what, then, an adequate philosophical approach to the mind entails, one that takes account of those features of mind that cannot be reduced to animal or computational models. Such an approach must provide a more complete account of the human mind and consciousness than either neuroscience, animal rationality, or AI. I therefore explore philosophical accounts of the mind that, like a Bahá'í view, emphasize a range of capacities of the mind: knowledge and rationality certainly, but also feelings (attitudes and emotions) and purposefulness (the intentionality of the mind). I argue that a philosophy that appreciates these features of the mind and grapples with their implications for human agency, normativity, and free will ultimately provides a more sufficient account of the mind than can a materialist neuroscience that seeks to flatten these capacities into purely physical terms, and thereby loses sight of the fullness of what they are.

The third strand focuses on where and how a Bahá'í contribution to our

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2 This observation comes from Colin McGinn's rebuttal of Patricia Churchland's reduction of mind to the physical across several issues of the *New York Review of Books*. See, for example, McGinn's "Storm Over the Brain."

understanding of the mind may help expand current philosophical positions. Even in philosophy that resonates in important ways with a Bahá'í understanding of the mind, there are, of course, differences. Most contemporary philosophers, for instance, even when they reject the reduction of mind to narrowly physical computational processes, still insist on placing the mind within the natural world rather than accepting the possibility that the mind is embedded in a reality that goes beyond the natural. This, however, requires highly abstract arguments, such as McDowell's position that our capacities of mind are "second nature," or references to "normativity" that remain apart from a natural scientific explanation. These positions have shortcomings, in my view, that an acceptance of a wider, "extended reality"[3] above and beyond the physical or the natural would avoid. Such a reality can better account for the qualitative "feel" of consciousness and its immateriality. The idea of an extended world is, of course, built into a Bahá'í approach to the question of mind, which centers on the "power of the human spirit" or "the rational soul."[4] Conversely, the philosophy I engage with typically understands the mind's essential features to be "human agency" and "normativity," concepts relating to the freedom and spontaneity of the mind. Through normativity, we take responsibility for our judgments and perceptions: we (potentially) choose how to evaluate the world around us, rather than passively receiving value judgments pre-formed in the world, the way we receive sense impressions. Through human agency, we choose our actions.[5] Though "human agency" is not too distant from the meaning of "the power of the human spirit," which on its face could be understood as describing a supra-physical capacity *emerging* from an essentially physical being, contemporary philosophy resists the idea of the "rational soul" which, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is

3 I take this term from Thomas Nagel.

4 "Spirit" and "soul" (sometimes "rational soul") refer to the same general concept in authoritative Bahá'í writings. "The human spirit, which distinguishes man from the animal, is the rational soul, and these two terms—the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one and the same thing" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 55:5). Further research on the use of these terms in the original language texts may provide insight into the logic behind specific uses of each. It may be that in some cases 'Abdu'l-Bahá's choice of one or the other term is based on His audience's framework for thinking about the nature of this human essence; perhaps in other cases the choice is meant to highlight a particular facet of this essence which, by its nature, cannot be encompassed by language. There may of course be other considerations.

5 "Both Heidegger and Korsgaard, following Kant, conceive of human agency in terms of … normativity" (Rousse 417); "If there is room for a substantial conception of the will in contemporary theorizing about human agency, it is most likely to be found in the vicinity of the phenomenon of normativity" (Wallace 195).

equivalent to "the power of the human spirit," and which is an essence that is *ontologically* supra-physical. Still, it may be that "normativity" and "human agency" are merely useful labels that cover insurmountable problems in philosophy's efforts to gain a genuine understanding of the mind and of human action. I suggest an alternative approach that relies on the power of the human spirit in the final sections of this paper.

The paper is structured around these three strands as follows. In Part One, I explore how different the human mind is from animal rationality, focusing on the uniquely conceptual nature of the human mind. In Part Two, I explore implications of the conceptual nature of the mind relating to learning and objectivity, and suggest that in its reliance on self-conscious awareness as the foundation of thought, as well as in its capacities for feeling and purposefulness, and its essential holism, the human mind is categorically distinguishable from AI. I add comments in Part Three about language as a central instrument of the mind. These sections together demonstrate that explanations confined to natural science are unable to account for the mind's faculties of knowing, feeling, and purposefulness, features of mind that not only shape consciousness on an individual level, but have allowed humans collectively to generate progressive civilization, a phenomenon with no parallel in the natural world. In Part Four, I argue that scientific practice is an exemplary expression of the mind's capacity for investigating reality and generating knowledge, but that, like any form of human knowledge, it is an outgrowth of human agency, or in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's terms, the power of the rational soul. It is a capacity that operates at a level of consciousness that cannot be reduced to causal interactions at the physical level in the brain. Having thus examined how science can both shed light on the mind, and have its own nature illumined by careful consideration of the nature of the mind's capacity to conduct scientific investigation, in Part Five I explore the same questions with respect to religion. Religion, like science, cannot simply be understood as a creation of the human brain; it is instead a powerful way of knowing for human beings, precisely because of the human mind's unique capacities to know. I comment on the language of Revelation, and the power of that language to reach not only the cognitive capacity of the mind, but also the feelings and purposefulness of human reality. The phenomenon of religion, therefore, helps give us a fuller appreciation of the nature of the human mind: engagement with Revelation can engender feelings, thoughts and purposefulness that strengthen the mind's relationship to an extended reality beyond space and time, to a world that is expansive beyond the merely sensible environment of the animal. Finally, in Part Six, I consider whether understanding the mind as an essentially spiritual phenomenon—as "the power of the human spirit" or "rational soul"—can help lend coherence to a

philosophy of mind that rejects a narrow physicalist understanding of mind, and if so, how such a paradigm can be presented in philosophical terms.

This paper is inspired by a talk given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on 20 September 1912, in which He says that philosophy should make efforts to seek understanding of both physical and spiritual aspects of reality. In that talk, He specifically credits the enduring importance of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to the way they combined physical and spiritual dimensions in their philosophy (*Promulgation* ch. 105). The philosophers I cite in this paper have devoted years of study to those great figures of the western philosophical tradition, and in their own ways, they show the fruitfulness of a philosophy that, if not explicitly embracing the spiritual, is not hidebound by an insistence on materialist reductionism.

Part One: Animal Rationality and Human Mind: Sensing an Environment versus Conceptualizing a World

Since antiquity, philosophers have compared human beings with animals, both in order to distinguish these two realities and to connect them. The work of John McDowell, one of the foremost philosophers of mind working today, provides useful insight into the limitations of an animal model for understanding human consciousness.

McDowell's arguments resonate with Abdu'l-Bahá's statements on this matter. For McDowell, a primary difference between the animal and human is that the human mind has a conceptual way of knowing and engaging the world, while the animal responds to an immediate environment. "World" and "environment" are distinguished by the fact that where an environment is defined by its materiality and sensibility, a world is a conceptual construct that includes both features immediately sensed, but also (and usually far more) features that reside as concepts in the human mind. Thus, an animal's environment, in this use of the term, consists of everything to which it has direct sensory access in a given moment. This sensing may trigger memories that prompt action; but the human mind situates itself in a wider world, within which it can invoke memories, concepts, imaginations, etc., including ones not triggered by immediate sensory input. In a similar way, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that "the animal perceives sensible things but cannot perceive conceptual realities" (*Some Answered Questions* 48:6). "Of this power of discovery which belongeth to the human mind, this power which can grasp abstract and universal ideas, the animal remaineth totally ignorant" (*Selections* 163:2).[6] McDowell, like

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6 I take the meaning of "conceptual" for both McDowell and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to be in line with Markus Gabriel's definition of a concept: "a concept is something by means of which we can distinguish something or some things from other things. The concept of a dog distinguishes dogs from

'Abdu'l-Bahá, understands the human mind as reliant on an enormous number of concepts that shape a world the mind then has in view. Concepts are the means by which the mind perceives and engages with that world. Some concepts represent the material features of the world: by concepts we know red from green, for example, and also know that red is in the concept class of color, which is distinct from the concept class of texture. These materially grounded concepts exist alongside others that supply us with the meanings we need in order to navigate the human world of institutions, norms, values, principles, and language. Thus, such crucial parts of our daily experience as feelings and purposes are also conceptual, yet immaterial. Through concepts, we distinguish indignation from anger, generosity from kindness. We learn from infancy thousands and thousands of concepts that shape the world we have in view. Many concept classes are nested within other concept classes; "dog" is a concept nested within the broader concept "animal," yet itself encompasses the concepts of "German shepherd," "poodle," and other breeds of dog. This is only one of many ways in which concepts are profoundly interdependent. Concepts also imply other concepts in chains of implication or assumptions: some concepts are assumed implicitly in order to understand other concepts. Humans do not draw on concepts in isolation; our capacity to know depends on the interrelationships between many concepts. As philosopher Markus Gabriel puts it:

> Whatever is real is integrated in a network of concepts. Every concept refers to another. If you know a concept, you thereby know a bunch of others too. This thesis is known as semantic holism and says that you're able to deploy a concept only if you're able to deploy a whole battery of further concepts that stand in various logical relations to it. (*Meaning* 194)

This emphasis on the role of concepts in human thought is not to deny the importance of sense perception and direct experience. We take in our experience by way of our senses, but in a manner that must always be mediated by the conceptual for us to have any experience at all. To paraphrase Kant, whom McDowell draws on to develop his own idea of the conceptual, sensations without concepts are blind, and concepts without human experience and sensations are empty (*Mind and World*). Concepts allow us to understand what we perceive, and "sensory consciousness" is always shaped by our understanding: "objects come into view for us [by sensations] in actualizations of capacities that are fully conceptual" (McDowell, *World in View* 34–35).

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cats, but also from lions and earlobes" (Gabriel, *Meaning* 192). Importantly, a concept in this sense does not require direct sensory comparison in order to distinguish two things. Thus, while an animal can distinguish different things by sight or smell, the human can distinguish them in the abstract using concepts.

In other words, to be receptive to the world we rely on a conceptual idea of a world that is already "there" in the mind, so that as we perceive and recognize features of the world (whether material objects or abstract realities), they are then available for placement within the world we have in view—or close enough to allow relative adjustments to a world that shapeshifts as we gain further knowledge of it. Successive experiences of life bring to us a manifold of sensations that we are able to grasp by the elimination and reduction of the available information—the millions of sensory bits available to our senses—bringing to our experience an understandable world that we then have in mind.[7] "Our subjective beliefs on the physical world have a decisive role on how we perceive reality . . . All that we perceive might be deeply contaminated by our subjective beliefs on the physical world" (Tabas, qtd. in "We Hear"). We interpret the sensations we experience in the world by way of the concepts we have learned, and through these concepts we then make judgments about the world and take actions—for reasons that are themselves conceptual—as we advance matters at hand, or bring about a better world we have in view. There is thus an inseparable cooperation of sensibility and conceptuality that cannot be disentangled.

This interplay between sense and concept does not seem to operate in the same way in animal cognition. In McDowell's assessment, which resonates with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanations on the topic, animals may appear to reason in a manner that seems comparable to human reasoning, but their reasoning is always a response to an environment and to particulars, not to a world. The animal "reasons" by way of differential response repertoires that rely on acute senses, and their excellent memory of environments and the particulars within such environments. In short, the animal distinguishes particulars not conceptually, but by acute sensibility and memory—which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out, are often better than human sensibility and memory, which have different functions than strict fidelity to the physical and the natural (*Some Answered Questions* 48:2).

The animal's ability to distinguish between particular objects, and even human gestures, may appear similar to our human discrimination, but has to do with particulars in the physical

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7 Psychologist Timothy Wilson estimates that the brain is inundated with "11 million discrete bits of information per second, of which no more than 40 can be consciously processed" (qtd. in Heath, *Enlightenment 2.0* 73). An animal, of course, may receive as much sensory data as a human being—or more, for animals with keener senses than ours—but to the extent that they react to and engage with an environment without needing to understand it, the simplifying function of concepts is not necessary for them. For recent discussions by neuroscientists on how our consciousness maps patterns of synaptic firings in the brain onto conceptual patterns, see Antonio Damasio's *Feeling and Knowing: Making Minds Conscious* and Anil Seth's *Being You: A New Science of Consciousness*.

environment rather than conceptual meanings. However aware and conscious animals may be, theirs is not a world that is conceptual and thus beyond the physicality of nature. The human mind understands and navigates both the world of physical objects and human realities that are perceived and brought to mind by our conceptual way of thinking, feeling, and engaging with purposefulness (or intentionality). The animals' engagement, at whatever level of consciousness it may be, is by way of biological needs, while human beings engage with a world, not a mere environment, with purposes and projects that reach beyond the biological.

An example can help illustrate the distinction. A horse, seeing an apple, moves to eat it: sensory information prompts a reaction. A human seeing the same apple may have a similar reactionary response, but can also engage in conceptual thinking. Thus, the sight of the apple reminds her of a trip to an orchard as a child, or of the threat of drought, or, by way of the story of Sir Isaac Newton, of the law of gravity. It leads to a decision to act in the world, by taking her children to an orchard, or limiting water waste in her household, or revisiting her university physics textbook.

The centrality of concepts to human thought also permits a self-awareness about our thinking that does not seem to be shared by the animal. As Hegel argued, human thought is about "cognizing the distinction of things" while "knowing and holding in mind what is being distinguished" (qtd. in Pippin, *Hegel* 104). This is the nature of judgment, the action by which thinking is conscious; for "to judge is to be aware not only of what one is judging, but that one is judging, asserting, claiming something," to others or to oneself (105). The human being can thus think about their own thoughts (and actions), holding them in mind and cognitively examining them in the same way as one can examine an external object.

Human beings also rely on more capacities of mind than sense perception and a memory of sensory information. 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms that the human capacities of imagination, thought, comprehension, and memory—along with "a common faculty . . . which mediates" between these capacities and the outer senses of perception—are spiritual powers, which seems to imply that they are different in kind from animal rationality (*Some Answered Questions* ch. 56). An element of this difference appears to be their holism. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh likewise confirms that

> [s]pirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments. As thou dost observe, man's power to comprehend, move, speak, hear, and see all derive from this sign of his Lord within him. (*Summons*, "Suriy-i-Ra'is" ¶35)

McDowell seems to be driving at a similar concept when he stresses the

inseparable cooperation of perception and conceptual thought, as noted earlier. He further points out that the conceptual nature of our thinking is only made possible by a "rationally organized network of capacities for active adjustment of one's thinking to the deliverances of experience" (*Mind and World* 29).

Andrea Kern follows McDowell's thinking about the conceptual nature of our rational capacity. In her important book, *Sources of Knowledge: On the Concept of a Rational Capacity for Knowledge*, she provides one way of understanding the above statement of Bahá'u'lláh on the "single reality" of "spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing." She, too, understands the rational capacity for knowledge as a single reality of mind and perception. While not referring to spirit or soul, she thus agrees with Bahá'u'lláh's idea that our rational capacity seamlessly brings together the conceptual mind and perceptions. This seamless integration of capacities enables us to further distinguish the human capacity for *judgment*. Kern elaborates on what it means to make a judgment. Judgment—deeming something true or untrue, correct or incorrect, according to some standard of truth or correctness—is always self-conscious, in that our knowing something is also being conscious of knowing something (or sincerely believing that we do).[8] In making a judgment, we rely on our perceptions and on concepts: our beliefs, our standards for truth (or our standards of the right, the good, or the beautiful), any necessary background assumptions, and logic and syntax. This reliance is seamless; while a person can analytically distinguish between the sight of a work of art, the aesthetic standard against which she appraises it, and the process by which the perception is measured against the standard, in actual experience there is no such distinguishing, supporting the contention that it is a "single reality" at work. Indeed, in making judgments we often rely on concepts, including the standard of truth by which we judge, without consciously bringing them to mind (Kern 182). This is a unique capacity for knowledge that combines at once perception, judgment, and action, along with an enormous amount of human learning.

This capacity for judgment has contributed to a further unique feature, or product, of the human mind. Human beings have created a world through the visual arts, architecture, music, and crafts, as well as engineering and infrastructure that strives to make the world more beautiful. Our capacity for judgment enables this creation, by allowing us to judge proportion, scale, and symmetry, to identify appropriate metaphorical expressions, and to decide on and assess art against aesthetic ideals. Thus, it is important to comment on the arts as a feature of culture that likewise goes beyond the animal's often more practical and sensible

8 Or as Pippin puts it, "[j]udgment is the consciousness of judgment . . . There is not two acts, but one" (*Hegel* 105).

reshaping of its own environment in ways that fall relatively short of the human being's efforts.

A final point on which McDowell differentiates the animal and human mind is that we characterize all human beings as moral or immoral, but hardly ever conceive of animals in these terms. This position finds support in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reminder that while the scorpion may seem evil in relation to the human being, it is, in its own self, good (*Some Answered Questions* 74:5). This is not, on its face, an attribution of good (or bad) moral behavior to the scorpion, but an assertion of its ontological goodness as a creation of God. This is the sense of good and evil within which nature and animals can be assessed, and all in this sense are good in themselves, even if from our perspective they can cause bad outcomes for us. Only in the human realm is it meaningful to attribute good and evil to intentions and actions.

In *A Natural History of Human Thinking*, linguist and developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello summarizes much of the research regarding differences between the human mind and animal rationality. This research largely bears out the conceptual differences between animal and human minds outlined in the philosophy above. Tomasello focuses in particular on the thinking of the great apes, widely considered to represent the apex of non-human mental ability. These animals, of course, do have prodigious capacities. In recent experiments, often involving the use of tools, they have demonstrated a capacity to re-imagine situations on some level; similar capacities can be seen elsewhere in the animal kingdom, as in certain birds. While there is thus some evidence for the great apes' representation of the object world in simple abstract and causal, even intentional inferences in the mind, they are unable to adopt alternative perspectives. Tomasello summarizes how, unlike animals, human beings have:

> (1) the ability to cognitively represent experiences to oneself 'off-line'; (2) the ability to simulate or make inferences transforming those representations causally, intentionally, and/or logically; (3) the ability to self-monitor and evaluate how these simulated experiences might lead to specific behavioral outcomes . . . [or to undertake] (4) thoughtful behavioral decisions. (4)

These capacities at an individual level have an exponential impact when deployed at the level of the group, and give rise to human ways of being together that the more basic cognitive capacities of the great apes do not permit. In addition to the "shared world" constructed by human language, as discussed below, the human ability to decenter our individual perspective, to take neutral-agency perspectives, appreciate the perspective of others, and coordinate action accordingly, does not find a strong correlate in the great apes.

Any discussion of how conceptual

thinking distinguishes humans from animals, particularly in its implications for coordination, necessarily requires consideration of language. However, before considering language in full, which will have implications for how the pursuit of scientific and religious knowledge shed light on the nature of mind, it will be helpful to explore some further implications of the conceptual mind.

Part Two: How the Conceptual Mind Learns

Learning at the Intersection of Self-Conscious Awareness and Social Cooperation

Having introduced key features of the human mind through contrast with animals, I want to specifically explore how the mind learns new ways of viewing the world. Such learning involves the multiple realities of cognition, feeling and purpose that the mind engages. Though the platform for such learning is always our own self-conscious awareness, it is important to emphasize our inherently social nature as minded creatures. Both the self-referentiality and social embeddedness of learning highlight that the human mind, as discussed in the previous section, operates in a world, not merely in an environment. This world is in fact constructed of many worlds, including our inner world and shared social worlds. All are built out of an architecture of concepts. The features explored here will support the argument, made later in the paper, that a philosophy of mind that acknowledges the more-than-animal capacities of the human mind, and rejects a reductionist physicalist neuroscientific explanation of these capacities, need not reject out of hand the concept of the mind as an essentially "supernatural" phenomenon. This argument will be further developed by considering the knowledge systems of science and religion in light of human language.

We can begin with Tomasello's insight that the capacity of human groups to progressively build on advances in culture (broadly speaking, including technology) is due to a fundamental feature of human conceptual thinking. Where animals can share a sensory environment, and use this sharing as the basis of cooperation, humans can achieve a different degree of cooperation thanks to our capacity to share a world of concepts:

> human beings construct an intersubjective world with others—shared but with differing perspectives . . . [this is] fundamental to human cooperative communication. (46)

Tomasello's insight into the cooperative structure of human teaching and learning by no means applies only to formal learning in the classroom. It is inherent in human learning from the very beginning, as demonstrated by human infants who master "joint attention" with mothers before speech

develops, allowing for the coordination of complex actions, and, as we mature, a "collective intentionality" with others. Joint attention, crucially, is more than two minds paying attention to the same thing; it is paying attention with awareness that this attention is shared, something that human infants are capable of in some form from a young age. While great apes demonstrate certain characteristics of joint attention, these do not continue to develop into the rich forms of collective intentionality that unfold as the human child matures. "The idea that the human mind in its infant stages, as it were, looks at the physical world and tries to make sense of it, is completely mythical . . . [O]ur first encounter with reality is an encounter with people" (Gabriel, *Not a Brain* 37). Other people and their minds have far greater impact on a baby's growing awareness and consciousness than the baby's encounters with a world of objects. Babies meet mother, father, and significant others, and experience their own consciousness by way of immediate relationships, mediated by powerful gestures and enactments. Babies begin learning through different social practices that are mindful, including with respect to the physical world. The physical world takes shape within a baby's consciousness mediated by concepts, standards and norms gleaned from other minds. The baby, in effect, learns of the world (in the expansive, more-than-environment sense) in its mental features as much as in its physical features, and does so by way of a triangulation between the infant mind, other minds, and the reality of an object world. Thus, even as the child learns about the object world by relying on others' first-person reactions towards, and expressiveness regarding, that world, they simultaneously learn the importance of emotions, meanings, and intentionality.

No creature is as helpless, for as long, as the human infant. Those inclined to see a design in the features of our existence might point out that it is arguably our complete dependency on other people and their reactions to us that enables us—indeed, requires is—to learn so early the foundation of human sociability: that others have minds and consciousness as we do. Obviously in the infant this is not yet self-consciousness, but the first glimmerings of a world we wake up to over the years of our infancy as we learn a complex of feelings, purposes and thoughts that is extraordinarily vast. The human capacity to entertain multiple perspectives, for instance, which seems to elude the great apes, begins to develop as early as between the ages of two and three.

The dependence of the human mind on social learning is exemplified by how we learn language. From his first word at twelve to eighteen months old, the child acquires well over 10,000 words by the age of six, while simultaneously learning rules of syntax and semantic usage that build to an enormous complexity (Pinker)—and all this, as philosopher of mind and language Donald Davidson emphasizes, is done on very thin evidence and limited experience. And it is not that one word

is uttered, then another, in an additive process of learning; this is a process of gestures, actions, enactments between mother and father and baby, that builds a world of sense, a holistic picture, that is grasped by the baby (Taylor, *The Language Animal*). "Mama" may be the "first word" uttered, but it is already embedded in a baby's understanding of a whole world of previous interactive gesture and response that has been growing in the mind of the baby. This allows the baby to begin utterances in speech intimately tied to a world that is blossoming in the mind of the infant, a world where the sun comes up gradually, as it were, as the infant develops and learns. As Wittgenstein writes, "Light dawns gradually over the whole" (qtd. in McDowell, *World* 168). Wittgenstein brings into the picture the imaginative powers of the multiple language-games in which human beings become quickly adept across the many social practices of human reality.[9] And, as philosophy now emphasizes, it is the sentence, not words themselves, that comprise meanings, facts and truths (the good, the right, and the beautiful).

Philosopher Charles Taylor, too, refers to the capacity of human infants to quickly acquire a capacity for "joint attention" with mothers and significant others, and notes the emergence of "the cultural conventions, norms and institutions, including language" (*Language* 141) that allow human beings to develop ideas of objectivity by way of a detachment from first-person consciousness to agent-neutral perspectives. At a very early age, this enables the coordination of action by a "we-intentionality" among groups of human beings.[10]

In line with the highly cooperative nature of the human mind, Charles Sanders Peirce, the seminal pragmatist philosopher, argues, as does Hegel, that it is a mistake to think of "belief as *individual* belief. Of course the beliefs of individuals are flawed; no individual mind is capable of an accurate and objective knowledge of reality" (qtd. in Menand 228). It is in the shared views of many minds that we come to know the world. This agrees with Davidson's view that all members of the human race share far, far more conceptually than the small proportion of views on which we disagree.

It is always, of course, our own consciousness or mind, in the first-person, that serves as the only platform we have by which we engage the world.[11] This first-person awareness comes first in any order of an explanation of reality. It is important to note that our

9 See Hans J. Schneider's discussion of imagination and calculation in *Wittgenstein's Later Theory of Meaning*.

10 See "How Language Grows" in Taylor's *The Language Animal*.

11 This discussion of the centrality of self-consciousness is largely inspired by the complementary views of Merlin Donald in *A Mind so Rare*, and Sebastian Rödl in *Self-Consciousness and Objectivity*. Merlin writes from the perspective of psychology and cognitive neuroscience; Rödl from the perspective of Hegelian philosophy.

self-conscious judgments are not simply subjective, although they can be. Our judgments about reality can approach objective reality to the extent that we have developed them in sound, cooperative social practices with other minds—discovering how others judge objective reality, learning how to think from others' perspectives as well as our own, bringing these multiple perspectives together according to standards or principles of truth that we have learned with respect to the object world, or by standards of the good, the right, or the beautiful, that we have learned by way of our ability to share others' perspectives in multiple social practices since infancy. We may have judgments we aren't sure of, or that are wrong, and those may be called subjective, but when we judge by standards or norms of truth using our rational capacity for knowledge, we judge objectively in the best way we know how. Objective knowledge, we then conclude, is a neutral, third-person judgment that comes *after* our first-person judgments. It is *derivative* of our first-person consciousness and rational faculty as we come to understand each other in our many first-person to first-person exchanges through life.

When we think of objective knowledge, we tend to privilege more formal, physical descriptions of phenomena. Such descriptions are, of course, powerful: being able to capture the operation of air currents in mathematical terms allows the human mind to design and refine flying machines. And yet such descriptions are utterly inadequate to capture the *experience* of phenomena, which can only be known from the perspective of first-person consciousness. A man who is entirely blind from birth will not understand and appreciate color by finding out about brain processes in the visual cortex, or by listening to testimony from others. He has to *experience* color first-hand, a phenomenon in the mind that is simply not made existent by any "objective" description of the electro-magnetic spectrum. Someone who is deaf cannot appreciate the impact in a hearing person's mind, whether by way of the mind's capacity for feeling, imagination, or cognition, of hearing Puccini's "Nessun Dorma," no matter how refined an understanding the deaf person has of sound waves and the relationship of the ear to the auditory regions of the brain. This is the nature of mind and consciousness, a feeling and mindedness that refutes any and all physical explanations of the brain as a way to account for our conscious minds. Yet there are available to the blind or the deaf, conceptual translations—not qualitatively comparable in the sense of conscious appreciations—that do allow, nonetheless, sufficient shared conceptions to permit coordinated actions.

Thus, if our self-consciousness is *the* platform or space by which we make judgments and take actions, this has implications for the extent to which those judgments and actions can be studied, quantified, and explained from the outside. Our understandings are always internal understandings, and while they can be explained

derivatively by an external explanation, such an explanation is already less than the awareness of reality that we know by knowing our own minds. Indeed, an individual can arguably gain a better understanding of another's mind by the exercise of the simple, yet profound, human capacity to take multiple perspectives, than the researcher could obtain by even the most detailed description of the workings of that person's brain. Just as we know ourselves from within, we can to some extent come to know another person's conscious sense of themselves, not through scientific measurement, but through intentional perspective-taking, aided by our interpretation of the other's expressive language and actions. We can, however roughly, know what the other feels and thinks because we can to some extent take their position, and feel and think it ourselves. And this, again, is a capacity only made possible by our own foundational self-consciousness.

Both of the facets of thinking and learning just discussed—the social and the self-conscious—have implications for how we make judgments about what is true or correct, how our thinking can go wrong, and how we can become aware of this and respond.

A genuine capacity for knowledge requires the ability to recognize that we can at times be wrong. Humans, of course, have this ability; yet, as Hegel pointed out, we often overlook the grip on our minds of concepts that are wrong and prevent sound thinking and reasoning. While Descartes had questioned the ways the mind grasps a concept, Hegel asked: How is it that *concepts grasp our minds* so firmly that they then limit our thought and reasoning.

Hegel's question provides a way of understanding an important passage of Bahá'u'lláh:

> To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts. (*Gleanings* 148:1)

As we saw from McDowell, we take in the world by placing what we experience within the world of concepts we have construed over years of learning. Yet such learning may be seriously misinformed. Becoming aware of inconsistencies in the vast array of concepts that make up our world can prompt adjustments, as can learning new concepts or new relationships among existing concepts. However, while individuals can in this way correct some measure of error their thinking, our concepts and view of the world can also be changed gradually by sound social practices that involve shared perspectives and cooperation.

At the same time, Bahá'u'lláh points out limitations to which man's finite mind is strictly subjected. Where some concepts can be changed over time by appropriate learning, there is another

kind of limitation which we can never overcome and which pertains to the actual workings of our own minds and the way in which the "rational faculty" (or soul) mediates the operation of the mind. Referring to the "rational faculty," Bahá'u'lláh says,

> Wert thou to ponder in thine heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all the concentrated intelligence and understanding which the greatest minds have attained in the past or will attain in the future, this divinely ordained and subtle Reality... thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue. (*Gleanings* 83:4)

Markus Gabriel may be identifying one aspect of this limitation on ever understanding the rational soul when he points to a limit in thought's ability to apprehend itself:

> Because thinking is something real, the conditions of its emergence are not known to us in their entirety . . . how exactly a concrete thought process unfolds, is something it takes a further thought to grasp. No thought can catch itself in the act. (*Meaning* 217)

This limitation, of course, in no way absolves us from the responsibility to seek to increase our understanding within the limits imposed on it, and to identify and improve on errors in our understanding. The Bahá'í writings unequivocally call upon us to always advance in our learning and our investigation of reality, which sometimes does require modifying firmly held, yet erroneous, concepts.

The "Space of Reasons": Feelings, Cognition, and the Holistic Mind

By what means, then, can the mind fulfill this mandate, given that our thoughts are vulnerable to error and bound by the limitations just described? McDowell's discussion of "reasons" is helpful on this question:

> [W]e make sense of rational relations between experience and judgment only in the context of an equation between the space of concepts and the space of reasons. Thought can bear on empirical reality only because to be a thinker at all is to be at home in the space of reasons. (*Mind and World* 125)

The idea of a "space of reasons," as McDowell puts it, refers to the capacities of mind by which we reason through the elements of that multiplicity of human realities: feelings, beliefs, attitudes, norms, memories, imagined counterfactuals or future possibilities, motivations, purposes, projects, and values. And if guided rightly, and with enough experience in sound social practices, we take on reasons that adjust the concepts we hold. We generate reasons for the intentions and purposes of actions we take; and when reflection

is required, we rely on higher values and meanings that override passing desires and idle preferences. The reasons supporting our intentions usually go well beyond our immediate experience. We rely on a conceptual shaping of our experience in order to perceive the world, and rely on our imagination informed by new concepts to consider possibilities that don't yet exist, but may with the right sort of actions.

And in our consideration of the multiple realities that make up our view of the world it is important to recall passages from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings where He refers to our "understanding heart,"[12] alerting us to an understanding of the mind and heart as one. Our conceptual nature includes feelings, emotions, attitudes and other sensibilities. That we are self-conscious about our feelings, often come to understand them, and give them expression in language and gesture, provides evidence that they can have just as much of a conceptual hold on us as more cognitive concepts do. For the mind is not simply cognitive or intellectual. The mind thinks and judges with feelings as well as beliefs, and with attitudes that are themselves conceptual, for we know the object world as much as we know the world of principles, purposes, norms and standards, and the human situations that enter into the judgments and actions by which we engage the world.

There is little distance between the heart and the head, as attested by Bahá'u'lláh's request to us: "ponder in your hearts."[13] The cognitive, the affective (or emotional), and the purposeful are all present in mind as a feature of our human agency, consciousness, freedom, and spontaneity within the constraints of the world we have in view and which underlies and prompts our perceptions, judgments, affirmations and actions.

Feelings are, in their own way, just as much evaluations of situations as cognitive thoughts are. Ronald de Sousa argues that we respond to the situations of life with emotions learned during childhood or from literature and the arts. Such evaluations are judgments about the world that rely on the mind. Robert Pippin writes that "a rational capacity to take up the view of the other is based on a deeper and more original affective capacity" (*Interanimations* 133), while Rainer Forst writes, "Feelings are expressions of our beliefs and evaluations, not their opposite: someone who did not have any moral feelings would not really be a participant in social, evaluating practices" (22).

Here we see that the human mind is no more reducible to an analogue of artificial intelligence than it is to the animal mind. Unlike artificial intelligence that operates according to rules, terms and algorithms on only one logical level, our understanding of the world is by way of concepts that operate on different levels, including attitudes and feelings, purposes and projects.

12 See, amongst many, *Gleanings* 95:4 and 100:8.

13 See, for example, *Gleanings* 5:6, 65:4, and 108:11.

Gottlob Frege, who developed the first "concept script" that today serves as the basis of the digital revolution, is also credited with realizing that our human propositional judgements and utterances are always attached to attitude, normativity, and human agency. Markus Gabriel refers to Frege's "colouring and shading" of thought, and the way in which feeling accompanies thought. "When we reflect on thinking itself, we also express attitudes" (*Meaning* 75).

While analytical philosophy has tended to reduce thoughts to mere propositions or assertoric sentences, Taylor, McDowell, Gabriel and Pippin, among others, emphasize how language is also constitutive, as new meanings and concepts are developed that make sense of ourselves and human life. Language not only depicts an object world, but creates and constitutes higher values and meanings that define human reality. A complete understanding of thought recognizes human agency, and accounts for the attitude and feeling involved in the commitments and responsibility we attach to thoughts and judgments. It recognizes that thoughts involve different modalities—remembering, imagining, hoping, or asserting—and that we undertake thoughts with different levels of enthusiasm or detachment.

Irad Kimhi notes that "capacities for judgment, for language, for the deployment of logical words (such as "not" and "and") and for self-consciousness (and hence for the use of the word "I") . . . are all one and the same capacity. To appreciate the uniqueness of thinking . . . even the concept of a capacity threatens to block one way to a full appreciation of the uniqueness of thinking" (16).

Bahá'u'lláh's description of our "rational faculty" is important to these considerations. He describes the role of the rational faculty as fundamental to the agency of mind, whose instrumentalities can be understood to a degree even though its actual nature cannot be:

> Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man. Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose, thy sight and hearing, thy sense of smell and power of speech, and whatever else is related to, or transcendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty. (*Gleanings* 83:1)

In sum, while we inevitably must dissect the mind into distinct capacities in our efforts to understand it, and while there is also value in investigating correlations between features of the mind and particular brain areas or processes, this kind of analysis should not be allowed to obscure a fundamental truth about the mind, attested to by Bahá'u'lláh and recognized by the philosophers cited above: the human mind is not truly a composite of many parts, but a whole. While humanity will no

doubt continue to develop ever more sophisticated artificial systems that incorporate more features that we associate with the mind—some of them operating at levels beyond what is seen in humans—it seems unavoidable that these must always falls short of the holism that fundamentally characterizes a true human mind.

Part Three: Language and Shared Worlds

Having laid some groundwork by exploring correlations between philosophical understandings of the mind and its workings, and the picture of the human mind that emerges from the Bahá'í writings, I now return to the role of language in the human mind; this in turn will set the stage for a discussion of how science and religion shed light on, and can be better understood through, an adequate concept of mind.

Much of our conceptual capacity depends, of course, on language, which is comprised not only of words, but also of the gestures and enactments that accompany speech.[14] The relationship between the mind's perception and thought, and human action and engagement with the world, is inextricable, and it is mediated by language. The mind draws on language to reason through the desires, feelings, beliefs, thoughts, values, and purposes that have current salience for the person reasoning, and then also uses language to forms intentions for actions. Donald Davidson writes that "language is not an ordinary learned skill; it is or has become a mode of perception . . . essential to the other senses if they are to yield propositional knowledge. Language is the organ of propositional perception" (*Truth* 135). An animal, or a human newborn, in other words, can sense raindrops on its body and react to them; a more mature human who feels the same raindrops can generate the knowledge, through language, that "it is raining."

Charles Taylor writes, too, of how language widens our perceptual capacities, and increases our range of thinking and feeling. Insofar as an object, an emotion, a value or purpose, stands out in our minds, it does so in the context of a whole situation, a world that we have in view and that we have constituted by way of a language we have learned. This world is built of concepts put together using the subject-predicate structure of language. Some features of the world are constructed from direct, nonfigurative language—"the sky is blue"—and some from figurative language. Language then influences the way we perceive and take in the world (*Language* 93–94). Language gives us new feelings, new desires, new goals, new relationships, and introduces a dimension of strong values in our lives (33).

Language multiplies a thousandfold and more the combinations of concepts

14 "Speech acts involve more than emitting the appropriate words. They also involve bodily action, stance, gesture, tone of voice, and the like" (Taylor, *The Language Animal* 98).

available to the human mind. It allows us to theorize, to generate analogies and metaphors that connect concepts, and so influences how we perceive and understand a world beyond what is possible for the environmentally constrained animal. Its subject and predicate structure gives us a powerful way of combining properties and objects, abstractions and particulars, adding to capacities for logic we have developed since infancy. Language enables us to continually make judgments, relying on logical operators that we are not usually conscious of using—the logic of identity, non-contradiction, exclusions and inferences of the if-x-then-y sort.

The human being operates with vocabularies of tens of thousands of words, and intricate rules of syntax that we deploy without pause or thought. Even when we get words wrong, or mangle syntax, our common sense way of thinking allows us to understand each others' utterances. Indeed, the capacity of language to enable communication between minds is remarkable for its flexibility. As Davidson has argued, we rely on an enormous set of interrelated concepts that are shared universally by all human beings, the majority of which were developed in infancy, childhood and adolescence. This has always, through history, allowed human beings to meet and converse across widely different languages and cultures, employing Davidson's "principle of charity" by which we assume that other humans are rational beings navigating the same world as us. We are able to translate each other's languages, and even when differences in culture and linguistic usage create gaps in understanding, we can articulate those differences and gaps.[15]

The role of language in enabling, or constraining, our capacity to understand each other across linguistic and cultural barriers is contentious. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, for example, holds that our subjective views of the world are predominantly influenced by the languages we speak. As noted, Davidson argues that translation between languages goes far to mitigating the inherent irreducibility of these subjective views. At the same time, of course, different languages do create different ways of taking in and seeing the world. Yet the point made by Davidson, as well as Taylor, is that there is far more overlap between human beings' worlds than there is difference; or, in other words, that our shared world is greater than those worlds that are unique to each culture, linguistic group, or (ultimately) individual. Translation relies on this extensive shared world of human beings, and conceptual differences between particular languages represent only a portion of the enormity of conceptual reality that all human beings share.[16] Of course, something is always

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15 See Davidson's *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* and also his *Truth, Language and History*.

16 See Taylor's critique of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in chapter 9 of *The Language Animal*. Tomasello, as noted above, makes a similar point in arguing

lost in translation: the idea of a shared world should not lead us to conclude that there are no functional differences between languages, or to imagine that a language can be learned mechanically without reference to its cultural context and distinctive characteristics. But the point remains that the phenomenon of language, as a whole, is enabling of a collective life for the human race that other species do not have access to. Thus, where similar animals in the same place at a given time can share a sensory environment, humans can, through language, share a world across time, space, culture, etc. And, largely through language, humans can collectively expand and refine the conceptual landscape of that world, leading to developments in culture.

As with the human mind's way of learning, its reliance on language has implications not only for the world we share with others, but for our inner world. Human use of language differs in important respects from the computer's use of language, not least in that a human's use of language is intimately bound up with the human agent's own self-understanding, and cannot be properly considered without reference to this. Humans are language generators; we are constantly combining words, and the concepts they pertain to, in new and original ways.[17] And this language generation is not, as it is for the AI, a sophisticated recombination of words and phrases according to rules generated inductively through the analysis of thousands or millions of texts. For the human, language use and generation is bound up with meaning. Figurative language and new and novel expressiveness in turn influence the birth of new aspirations, projects and purposes. They give us ways of perception beyond the surface of things. Our discursive activity, our conversations with others, set up new relationships, redefining previous understandings.

This capacity of language to shape and direct our inner world is particularly powerful when we use language to grapple with things beyond the concrete. Davidson writes persuasively that we have two languages, one relative to the physical realm, and one that is about the mental realm. Taylor, in turn, refers to the former language as "designative," while the latter is only sometimes designative, and more often "constitutive." Where designative language assigns relationships between objects or concepts that require little or no interpretation—"the ball is round"—constitutive language

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that advances in human civilizations depend upon humans' shared grasp of a conceptual reality, including across linguistic divides.

17 Consider Noam Chomsky's observation that once a threshold of twenty to twenty-five words is passed, "almost every sentence uttered by an adult native speaker is a novel sentence. It is new . . . in the sense that no one in the history of the world has ever heard exactly that string of words before . . . This is an observation that has been empirically verified over and over again by examining large corpora, transcribing actual conversations, and so on" (Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust* 520).

requires interpretation and a less determinate grasp on such matters as feelings and attitudes, values and norms. We use these two languages—neither of which, Davidson argues, can be translated into the other—without pause or deep reflection, in conversation and in how we go about our lives.

'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to agree with both Taylor and Davidson when He explains that "human knowledge is of two kinds":

> One is the knowledge acquired through the senses. That which the eye, the ear, or the senses of smell, taste, or touch can perceive is called "sensible". . . . These are called sensible realities.
>
> The other kind of human knowledge is that of intelligible things; that is, it consists of intelligible realities which have no outward form or place and which are not sensible. For example, the power of the mind is not sensible, nor are any of the human attributes: These are intelligible realities. Love, likewise, is an intelligible and not a sensible reality. For the ear does not hear these realities, the eye does not see them . . . .
>
> But when you undertake to express these intelligible realities, you have no recourse but to cast them in the mold of the sensible, for outwardly there is nothing beyond the sensible. Thus, when you wish to express the reality of the spirit and its conditions and degrees, you are obliged to describe them in terms of sensible things . . . For example, [for] grief and happiness . . . you say, "My heart became heavy", or "My heart was uplifted", although one's heart is not literally made heavy or lifted up. (*Some Answered Questions* 16:1–4)

The existence of this second language pertaining to the mental realm, and the inextricable influence of language on our inner condition, point to a hard limit on the extent to which any human mind can be fully described from the external, objectivizing stance of neuroscience. However precisely neuroscience might map out the synaptic correlates to a person's realization that "my heart is heavy," this description will never capture the essence of the feeling thus described. Gabriel summarizes the issue well:

> Our self-conception . . . reflects our value system and our personal experience . . . It has developed in complex ways, in the tension between our understanding of nature, literature, legal systems, values of justice, our arts, religions, socio-historical and personal experience. There just is no way to describe these developments in the language of neuroscience that would be superior or even equal to the vocabulary [that we have] already at hand. (*Not a Brain* 15)

In the closing sections of this paper, I look first at how language and

the mind operate in natural science, a language Davidson characterizes as of the physical realm, Taylor as the designative. I will then look at the language of Revelation, which addresses both the physical realm and the mental realm—the designative and the constitutive—and how both languages relate to the material and the spiritual aspects of reality.

Part Four: Science

We think of science as proceeding by way of designation, description, and explanation of physical and natural causality, and there is validity to this: at a certain point in the process by which human minds investigate natural phenomena using the tools of science, discoveries are framed in this kind of language. In some scientific domains, as in physics, this designative language can even be crystallized into mathematics. However, if we focus only on these outcomes of scientific activity, framed in this particular kind of language, we end up missing the full richness of the mental processes by which human minds engage in science.

It is noteworthy, for instance, that the human ability to "cast" intelligible realities into the "mold of the sensible" highlighted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is vital to the pursuit of science as well. Whatever is undiscovered in a given process of natural causality is, in a certain sense, insensible: it has not yet been made accessible to us to be measured. Scientists will often advance the ways we perceive the world by relying first on metaphor and analogy with reference to the concrete and sensible in order to hypothesize about possible undiscovered causal mechanisms. Once the hypothesis is tested, and phenomena are observed through elaborate instrumentation, analogy can remain useful in understanding what has been observed; only later are such analogies articulated into more formal theory. Consider, for example, how non-intuitive findings of physics in the twentieth century at both the relativistic and quantum scales almost demand to be understood through metaphor and analogy before the student can undertake to comprehend them more formally.

The process by which science advances through metaphors and analogies has been labelled "abduction" by Charles S. Peirce.[18] Abduction involves a way of thinking that relies on highly focused observation, but also on imagination and a general intelligence. This is a capacity of the human mind beyond inductive and deductive reasoning whereby scientists eliminate fanciful theories and mere superstition by deepening their experience with, and intuitive understanding of, the phenomena at hand.[19] This exploration in

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18 For an informative summary, see Igor Douven's "Peirce on Abduction."

19 Peter Godfrey-Smith explains abduction as "inference to the best explanation" in *Theory and Reality*, and as a way of eliminating other possible explanations. Imre Lakatos writes about scientific

depth, beyond the surface observation of the everyday world, is necessary, as Francis Bacon wrote at the dawn of modern science, since:

> the greatest hindrance and aberration of the human understanding proceeds from the dullness, incompetency and deceptions of the senses; in that things which strike the senses outweigh things which do not immediately strike it, though they may be more important. Hence it is that speculation commonly ceases where sight ceases; insomuch that of things invisible there is little or no observation. (58)

Insights that come from intense investigation provide clues that lead to theories that advance science. Such insights emerge through the mind's capacity to associate disparate things and find connections and resonance, to make imaginative leaps. Thus, however much knowledge is ultimately *captured* in science by designation and explanation, the mind has capacities for *generating* knowledge that do not operate by simple induction (in the way an artificial intelligence generates "knowledge" inductively from large data sets, for instance).

Scientific investigation thus involves looking into phenomena in order to discover entities and forces below the surface of the ordinary perceptual world. This is stressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His discussion of the role and power of the soul in scientific discovery:

> Through the power of the rational soul, man can discover the realities of things, comprehend their properties, and penetrate the mysteries of existence. All the sciences, branches of learning, arts, inventions, institutions, undertakings, and discoveries have resulted from the comprehension of the rational soul. (*Some Answered Questions* 58:3)

So powerful and consequential is this capacity of the soul to discover realities beneath what is immediately sensible that, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá stresses, it must be understood as an essentially supernatural capacity:

> The virtues of humanity are many, but science is the most noble of them all. The distinction which man enjoys above and beyond the station of the animal is due to this paramount virtue. It is a bestowal of God; it is not material; it is divine. All the powers and attributes of man are human and hereditary in origin—outcomes of nature's processes—except the intellect, which is supernatural . . . The power of intellectual investigation and scientific acquisition is a higher virtue specialized to man alone. (*Promulgation* 20:2)

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research programs that showed promise or decline as a way of then formulating theory that was plausible, in *For and against Method*.

The implications of this characterization of the mind and scientific inquiry for philosophy will be considered later. For the present, we can consider how the human mind's capacity for scientific investigation sheds light on the distinctiveness of the phenomenon of mind itself (whether or not one sees in this distinctiveness evidence of a spiritual or "supernatural" essence to the mind). Indeed, it seems plausible that the way the mind undertakes science may not be reproducible in, for instance, artificial intelligence systems.

As noted earlier, scientific advances rely on not only inductive and deductive reasoning, but also on abductive reasoning or "general intelligence." The role of general intelligence in particular demonstrates the futility of efforts to model scientific practice on a series of technical steps, or to reduce it to an algorithm. As Hilary Putnam writes, "there is no such thing as *the* scientific method" (72). This is not only due to the diversity of methods within science, which range from classification and taxonomies, to mathematical methods and computer simulations, and from laboratory experiments involving ever more elaborate instrumentation and measurement approaches to speculative cosmological theory.[20] More fundamentally, the idea of "the" scientific method is misleading because the crucial role of general intelligence is simply not reducible to a formulaic approach. Until recently, histories of scientific advance neglected the role of haphazard inventions, innovations, and advances that were initially disconnected from theory.[21] As Thomas Kuhn notes, scientists develop ways of *seeing* particular domains of reality by way of a kind of sixth sense or an intuitive grasp arising from their absorption in scientific practice. There are few better explanations of this than the book on scientist Barbara McClintock, *A Feeling for the Organism*. Author Evelyn Fox Keller describes the (often overlooked) contributions McClintock made to ecological and genetic science thanks to how she came to "see" phenomena, a kind of vision arising out of her absorption and dedication to sound scientific practices. Einstein felt that, "only intuition, resting on sympathetic understanding, can lead [to discovery of new laws], . . . daily effort comes from no deliberate intention or program, but straight from the heart" (qtd. in Keller 201).

The crucial role of intuitive understanding in science does not seem to be one that artificial intelligence, as it is currently being developed, can take on. While AI may serve as a tool of immense power for researchers, there seem to be core aspects of the activity of science that the human mind alone can undertake. An increasing number of articles and books now note how efforts in artificial intelligence have failed to model "general intelligence."

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20 See Ian Hacking's work paper, "Finding Out: Prolegomena to a Theory of Truthfulness and Reasoning in the Sciences."

21 See Stephen Gaukroger, *Civilization and the Culture of Science*.

In *The Myth of Artificial Intelligence: Why Computers Can't Think Like We Do*, Erik J. Larson points out that the enormous funds given to AI research, which continues to rely on the inductive processing of large data sets, displace funding for more effective scientific research that includes deductive as well as abductive reasoning. Artificial intelligence's reliance on inductive modelling alone allows it to discover correlations, but provides few insights into causality; AI's lack of understanding of underlying causes makes it error prone with respect to specific cases (even before considering the often biased and subjective rules and algorithms that AI programmers write into their programs). Our efforts to develop this kind of "intelligence" have not yet discovered the path to enabling AI to develop a genuine scientific understanding of deeper forces, and causal connections at work.

Comments by Rebecca Golden of the Genetic Literacy Project are enough to show the potentially insurmountable problems jointly faced by AI researchers hoping to reproduce the functioning of the human brain, and neuroscientists who hope to model the human brain, or ever understand the mind completely:

> The human brain is estimated to have approximately 86 billion neurons, each neuron with possibly tens of thousands of synaptic connections; these little conversation sites are where neurons exchange information. In total, there are likely to be more than a hundred trillion neuronal synapses—so a computer recording a simple binary piece of information . . . would require 100 terabytes. The amount of storage needed to store even this very simple information every second over the course of one day for one person would be more than 100,000 terabytes, or 100 petabytes. Supercomputers these days hold about 10 petabytes. And this quick calculation doesn't account for the changes in connectivity and positioning of these synapses occurring over time. Counting how these connections change just after a good night's sleep or a class in mathematics amounts to . . . many more bytes than the estimated atoms in the universe. The wiring problem seems intractable in its magnitude. (qtd. in Larson 250)

It would seem that just as animal cognition is an inadequate model for understanding the human mind, artificial intelligence is not a convincing model for our own capacity for thought; and perhaps our efforts to make AI in the image of our own minds are destined for failure. Just as a thought, in Gabriel's words, cannot "catch itself in the act," the mind cannot fathom itself. This is attested to in the Bahá'í writings, and is coherent with an understanding whereby the mind is an essentially spiritual phenomenon. We will explore this further later, but it helpfully leads us to the broader point that science cannot fully describe the world.

It is a principle of science that evidence always underdetermines theory. Evidence, in other words, can always support different theories, as Kuhn emphasizes. That is why science is so intent on gaining ever more evidence in order to endlessly adjust theory. We never have complete evidence as there is always more to learn and know, and theory is likewise always open to adjustments, if not outright paradigm shifts.

Our scientific theories, then, can never be total descriptions of reality.[22] Mathematician and philosopher John Myhill summarizes this well: "There is no nonpoetical description of the whole of reality" (qtd. in W. Hatcher 11).[23] This view is consonant with the Bahá'í writings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the concept of "nature itself" is "not a sensible reality," but an ideal, an abstraction (*Some Answered Question* 16:3). Bahá'u'lláh likewise confirms that we will never have a total explanation of the natural world:

> Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. . . . It is endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp. Indeed a man of insight can perceive naught therein save the effulgent splendor of Our Name, the Creator. (*Tablets*, Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat ¶14)

This perspective returns a measure of enchantment to nature and confirms Myhill's suggestion that poetry—and, we might add, perhaps most especially the divine poetry of Revelation—provides the only total view of reality.

Part Five: The Language of Revelation

Having briefly considered how the mind generates scientific knowledge, as well as the limits of the mind's scientific pursuit in understanding the totality of reality, I now turn to the question

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22 Quantum mechanics has also been used to demonstrate science inability to arrive at a total description of nature, since it understands the physical world at the subatomic level as a matter of probabilities only, not strict causality. For a recent discussion, see Vahid Ranjbar's "The Quantum State Function, Platonic Forms, and the Ethereal Substance."

23 This conclusion is based on Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, confirmed by the Hilbert Space model of quantum mechanics, and reinforced by the mathematician Gödel's incompleteness theory which proves that no axiomatic system, even basic arithmetic, can ensure both completeness and consistency. If a model of basic arithmetic can only be complete if it is inconsistent, or consistent if it is incomplete, we can be sure there will never be a total understanding of the physical realm. See physicist Roger Penrose's *Shadows of the Mind*, especially with respect to his use of Gödel's theory in demonstrating the difference between mind and brain, and William Hatcher's *Minimalism* (11) for references to these same ideas.

of what religion, and Revelation, can tell us about the mind. Where science aims at a determinate knowledge of entities and forces across well-defined domains of phenomena in its multiple sub-fields, the language of Revelation encompasses determinate and indeterminate knowledge, and experience of realities both physical and natural as well as spiritual and beyond nature.[24]

Before considering what the phenomenon of Revelation might tell us about the mind, it may be helpful to say a few preliminary words about the phenomenon of art, and its relation to religion. The reason for this is that some of the capacities of the human mind to know and experience reality transcend intellectual or cognitive apprehension. The mind, as noted above, has capacities for feeling, for moral and purposeful action, and also for aesthetic perception and expression. Art, as an element of human civilization, has long justified a more capacious view of the mind, as it highlights the mind's capacity for astonishment and awe, perplexity and puzzlement in our encounter with aesthetically stirring phenomena. This capacity is equally—or perhaps even more powerfully—engaged as the mind tries to understand the contingencies and mysteries of ordinary human life, and to contemplate being and reality.

Common to art and Revelation is a concern with meaning, and a reliance on metaphor as a means of expressing the inexpressible. Like philosophy—and unlike science considered in isolation—religion and much of art intentionally explore meaning and the purpose of life. The pursuit of meaning can, of course, be a legitimate source of understanding and wisdom, and therefore a particular kind of knowledge, distinct from the knowledge generated by science. In her book *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt explores how western philosophy emerged in the Greek world largely as a matter of wonder, in the pursuit of understanding at the level of meaning. In this pursuit, Greek philosophers, including Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, encountered the problem of the ineffable—or that which cannot be put into language. Arendt notes that Plato was often reluctant to put his views in writing, and that Aristotle wrote of "truth that refused to be expressed in discourse" (114). For these philosophers, as well as later thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, who ran up against the limits of language, metaphor assumed a central role in their attempts

24 See Hatcher's *Minimalism* for a discussion of the distinct purpose and nature of scientific language and the language of Revelation. I had the good fortune to know Hatcher, and learned a great deal from our many conversations. Importantly, he points out that the ways of knowing fostered by each are complementary—one does not supersede the other: "intuition and mysticism may give rise to transrational modes of knowing reality . . . [but neither] divine revelation or mysticism can contradict the conclusions of reason *in the face of the same information base* . . . there is a fundamental difference between . . . the transrational and the irrational" (114).

to convey knowledge about questions of meaning. Art and Revelation have, of course, similarly relied on metaphor to express the ineffable. The examples of this phenomenon in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are too numerous to count; we might consider one example from The Seven Valleys in which He simultaneously explicitly speaks of the ineffability of spiritual meanings that language is powerless to convey, employs metaphor to provide a glimpse of what lies beyond the veil of the ineffable, and uses art—specifically the poetry of 'Aṭṭár and Ibn-i-Fáriḍ—to help the reader understand what cannot be grasped cognitively:

> The tongue faileth in describing these three valleys, and speech falleth short. The pen steppeth not into this arena, the ink leaveth only a blot. In these stations, the nightingale of the heart hath other songs and secrets, which make the heart to leap and the soul to cry out, but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, and confided only from breast to breast.
>
> The bliss of mystic knowers can be only told from heart to heart,
>
> A bliss no messenger can bear and no missive dare impart.
>
> How many are the matters I have out of weakness left unsaid;
>
> For my words would fail to reckon them and mine every effort would fall short.
>
> O friend, till thou enter the garden of these inner meanings, thou shalt never taste of the imperishable wine of this valley. And shouldst thou taste of it, thou wilt turn away from all else and drink of the cup of contentment. . . . (*Call* ¶¶ 63–64)

In this short paper, I am forced to set aside an exploration of the world of art and its different modalities of language and expression, modalities that engage the capacities of the mind to know and experience reality in an aesthetic and sensible way that is less determinate than the knowing produced by science. Art brings a measure of indetermination and wonder to our perception and knowledge of the world. Through the arts we expand the powers by which we are able to bring alternative perspectives into view, and we develop our sense of a world that transcends the mere physical by way of evaluations and reactions that are emotional as well as cognitive. This growth in perspectives is not limited to our interaction with art itself; as de Sousa emphasizes, we often then shift those emotional evaluations into the situations of human life. The arts thus help us to see the world in new ways.

If this is true of the arts, how much more is it true of the language of divine Revelation, a form of language that looks beyond the causal and habitual perceptions and realities of human conceptuality, and aims to advance the mind's grasp of realities that include, but also transcend, the physical and

natural world.[25] I turn to Revelation and its language now, drawing on arguments from within philosophy itself to support the view that religious language— especially that of the most recent Revelation—allows unique access to certain ways of knowing.[26]

If human agency, or the power of the human spirit, is beyond physical determinations and descriptions of brain physicality, as many philosophers claim, then it may be worth asking if we might find a better resolution to the challenge of understanding the mind by relying on the concept of the rational soul and the power of the human spirit. As a path to bringing those ideas back into philosophical discourse, we might first investigate the capacity of the mind to know and engage with the language of divine Revelation. Such investigation can lead us to value this language of Revelation as a way by which human beings can navigate the contingencies of human affairs, and develop their capacity for cooperation, collective intentions and coordinated action—features that are unique to the human mind as philosophy itself has argued.

Before considering how Revelation might shed light on the mind itself, let us consider in more depth how it contributes uniquely to our ways of knowing in general. On the matter of religion, no less a secular philosopher than Jürgen Habermas has written,

> [R]eligion, which has largely been deprived of its worldview functions, is still indispensable in ordinary life for normalizing intercourse with the extraordinary. For this reason, even postmetaphysical thinking continues to coexist with religious practice . . . [and] throws light on a curious dependence of philosophy that has forfeited its contact with the extraordinary. Philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will be able neither to replace nor repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for this content eludes . . . the explanatory force of philosophical language and continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses. (*Postmetaphysical Thinking* 51)

> . . . philosophy has itself fostered a kind of cognitivist reduction and

25 Indeed, the Báb explains that some of the power of art may come from its ability to tap into the same source that gives Revelation its force: "It is the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit that causes words . . . from the tongue of poets, the significance of which they themselves are oftentimes unable to apprehend" (qtd. in Nábil-i-A‘zam 259)

26 Of course, as a believer in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, I consider His Writings, and those of the Báb, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice as truths and guidance that transcend the arguments and positions of philosophers. At the same time, I recognize the need to advance the discourse in philosophy around the existence of an "extended reality" beyond the merely material.

> has pinned reason down to only one of its dimensions, . . . the truth of assertoric sentences . . . pursuing truth is the only thing that still counts as rational. Questions of justice and questions of taste, as well as questions regarding the truthful presentation of self, are all excluded from the sphere of the rational. (49–50)

The questions Habermas refers to are reflected in the content of much religious language, just as religious language also addresses the capacities of feeling and purposefulness which many philosophers emphasize as central to an understanding of the mind. Habermas explains, too, that ordinary life is by no means "immune to the shattering and subversive intrusion of extraordinary events" (*Postmetaphysical Thinking* 51). Revelation speaks directly to the tragedies and crises facing humanity, providing a context for the mind to grapple with death itself, and with the appalling levels of personal suffering that exist in the world; yet even in confronting these areas of human experience that have so troubled human thought across history, religious language can inspire a sense of astonishment, awe and beauty, and bring about epiphanies, heightened excitement, love, and joy.

The language of divine Revelation provides a source of inspiration and guidance that widens the ways by which the mind can know and experience the world. It is a language that is more expansive, and often less determinate, than that of science. It brings to mind astonishment and solace, peace and insight. It prompts in the self-consciousness of mind an awareness of a larger sense of being and purposefulness than arises in the mere attending to the practical matters of physical survival. The language of Revelation conveys a sense of grace and contentment, but also inspires determination and perseverance; it opens for those who take such language seriously a form of knowledge that helps meet the practical imperatives of everyday life even as it provides a worldview beyond the particulars of ordinary life. This is a language that encompasses both the descriptive and the figurative or constitutive. Thus, the language of divine Revelation expresses determinate guidance, in specific laws, and well-defined principles and values; yet it also involves a way of knowing and experiencing life and the mystery of being itself. it. It conveys more general and sometimes indeterminate expressions of aspirations and noble goals that lead to different interpretations, and does so in a language that speaks to young and old, the humble or sophisticated, with an expression that can be understood by all. These two qualities of language together capture realities of truth, goodness and beauty, enabling the mind to gain an awareness and, to some extent, understanding of both its immediate reality and an extended, infinite reality that lies just beyond the horizon of our finite and humble lives.

Genuine religious language thus takes advantage of the mind's

composite of capacities and ways of knowing and experiencing the world, through thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and purposes. The mind relies on these capacities seamlessly, adjusting flexibly to different contexts, but it is always able to be inspired and guided by noble values and principles that, over successive Revelations from God, human beings have gradually come to understand. Exposed to such language, whether in the form of the Sermon on the Mount, the verses of the Qur'án, or the speeches attributed to the Buddha, human beings gain insights that have allowed them to overcome and transcend the contingencies of life and providence—contingencies that, as Bahá'u'lláh points out, are often "too mysterious for the mind of man to comprehend" on a cognitive level (Kitáb-i-Íqán 167).[27]

While this developmental effect of Revelation on the mind can be attested to by the individual, its effects can also be seen from a historical perspective. Scholars such as Robert Bellah, building on Karl Jaspers' concept of the Axial Age—a period of cultural ferment measured variously from around the time of the Buddha, the emergence of Greek thought, and the Revelation of the Old Testament, through to the Revelations of Christ and up to that of Muḥammad—have begun to document the ways religion stimulated the advance of human capacities of thought, feeling, and purpose. Bellah details impacts of religion on the evolution of the mind before and during the Axial Age, arguing that religion was the impulse behind significant shifts in the cognitive independence of the human mind.[28] Jaspers, for his part, wrote that the Axial Age formed "the spiritual foundations of humanity . . . foundations on which humanity still subsists today" (qtd. in Nirenberg and Nirenberg 98). This scholarship demonstrates a powerful relationship between religion, the human mind and the advance of human civilization. It does so by understanding religion as a general institution throughout history, rather than focusing on specific faith communities or religious labels that are often weighed down by dogma and clerical interpretations that cloud the originality of genuine Revelation language. Viewed in this perspective, history testifies to the impact of religion on human civilization with respect to culture, rationality, morality and language itself.

We can reflect, in light of this view of religion, on the importance of

27 Bahá'u'lláh's own language of Revelation consists of an enormous body of Writings of equally enormous range. He provides a practical vision of human purpose and relationship, inviting all the members of the human race to live in "the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship," and assures us that unity, cooperation and love among the peoples of the world that "can illuminate the whole earth" (*Gleanings* 132:3).

28 In addition to Bellah's works *Religion in Human Evolution* and *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, see also Ben Schewel's *Seven Ways of Looking at Religion*.

Revelation to the process of learning that Tomasello refers to as "the ratchet effect" by which "cumulative cultural evolution" occurs in the "social learning" of humanity. Tomasello views the human mind's cooperative nature (discussed earlier in this paper) as arguably its essential quality. Habermas' prodigious philosophical work reflects the same idea: human beings advance by a process of social reasoning in which minds are engaged cooperatively and communicatively in unending conversations that touch contexts of affectivity, cognition, and purposefulness, in an ongoing assessment of the consequences of our actions with a view to establishing better reasons for subsequent and better coordinated action.

Yet, even if the Axial Age provides abundant evidence of the historical role of the language of Revelation in fostering this fundamental human capacity for cumulative cultural development through cooperation, can it fulfill the same function today? Humanity faces enormous challenges: environmental harm, gross inequities across and within countries, racism, prejudices and injustices that cause appalling suffering to many, to name a few. These challenges represent an evident failure of human solidarity. Despite an understanding of the human mind as uniquely designed for cooperation and for collective intentionality, we seem to be falling short of the minimal level of cooperation demanded by the exigencies of our times. With a renewed confidence in the power of the human mind and its capacity for cooperation, knowledge and learning, we could broaden and deepen a shared view of the world in both its physical and spiritual dimensions. This would mean expanding and deepening our perception of social reality, refining our powers of judgement, and elevating the meaning and purpose of our lives.

Here I would like to suggest how, given what we have reviewed about the nature of learning in a social context, the role of language in the mind, and the particular attributes of the language of Revelation, a certain kind of "religious" practice might be considered as a powerful tool for humanity to resolve the challenges it faces. The example provided—the social practices prompted by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and elucidated by the Universal House of Justice—may not look like most people's idea of a religious practice. But it is, I would argue, a practice that both relies on the capacity of Revelation language to engage the human mind in a unique way, and takes advantage of the nature of social learning. It is a kind of practice, in short, that can give the observer a reason to have confidence in the human mind's ability to generate the collective intentionality and action needed to resolve the crises it faces. It provides evidence of the power and enormous influence that Revelation can have on the processes of mind in its learning to build better, more peaceful and prosperous communities.

Over the past twenty-five years, the Bahá'í community has been engaged in a collective, worldwide learning process, relying on an evolving conceptual

framework detailed in a series of letters of the Universal House of Justice. The process of learning has centered on a systematic educational program involving study circles for adults, junior youth empowerment programs, and children's classes. This program of education involves study of the language of Revelation and authorized interpretations, embedded in extensive conversation and discussion, as well as social practices undertaken by participants. This process encourages efforts to generate a collective intentionality that then allows for coordinated action characterized by creativity and imagination. Participants learn to apply the guidance studied, and then reflect and converse together about such actions and their consequences. This serves to stimulate advances in both individual and collective learning among the participants, whether Bahá'í adherents, their friends, families or neighbors.[29]

This process emphasizes both cognitive learning and the development of spiritual qualities, including attitudes, feelings, aspirations, and noble goals and purposes. It relies on appropriate kinds of social practices that involve action accompanied by others. This is learning by doing, as described by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*: "For the things we have to learn before we can do, we learn by doing" (qtd. in Kern 259). We take actions and we learn, replacing mistaken concepts with newer, better ways of viewing the world. With continued study of the language of Revelation, and with efforts to apply its guidance through action, our perceptions widen, deepen, and are enriched.

This systematic process promotes in its participants a deeper appreciation of the language of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whether one believes that He is a Manifestation of God or thinks of Him merely as one more among many educators and teachers of humanity whose language and ways of expression make sense, are coherent, and are also stimulating and encouraging. As all divine Revelations have done, Bahá'u'lláh's both elucidates the spiritual aspects of life and outlines a more appropriate relationship to the material aspects of reality. In language that is at once figurative and informative, explicit and explanatory, the Revelation addresses and activates those human realities of purposeful action, thought and feeling.

The impacts of the language of Revelation through the learning process described above are thus not measured in external outcomes alone. In this shared and cooperative enterprise of learning, there is an emphasis on standards of the right and the good. There is an assumption of the nobility of those who participate in the learning process, which stimulates aspirations to attain to higher levels of service, sacrifice, nobility, and positive action. The mind's self-understanding and its inextricable sociality mutually reinforce each other, as the personal drive

29 For a philosophical analysis of this educational process, see Sona Farid-Arbab's *Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy*.

to surpass one's previous self-understanding is simultaneously a drive to contribute to greater social cohesion and unity among all who participate. This may be understood as a process of self-transendence as described by philosopher William Desmond:

> Religious community binds together the human and the divine, and out of this it transforms the bonds holding humans together. The sources of social power undergo a transformation that carries human power to the edge of humanness. We understand power as given all along, a gift from motiveless generosity, motiveless goodness beyond the goodness of the gift, rousing in community the vision of humans living together an ethics of generosity in the finite image of the ultimate generosity. (486)

This process of learning, by way of a mind that develops feelings, attitudes, cognition, perception, and purposefulness relies on personal and collective efforts to translate the Revelation language into advances in skills, qualities of mind, and action. The participation of a few million people around the world has contributed to an evolving framework for action that relies on cycles of study, action, reflection, and deliberation and conversation among groups of friends who begin to see themselves, their local communities and neighborhoods, as well as their local and regional Bahá'í institutions as protagonists in the development of new ways of life.

Central to this kind of development is growth in the mind's capacity to understand reality. Beyond a more informed reading of the reality of both the material and spiritual nature of villages, towns, and city neighborhoods, participants learn to perceive and penetrate social reality at a deeper level. This process involves a re-evaluation of the standards we rely on in our judgments of others, of the truth, the good, the right, and the beautiful. There is as much to learn from false starts and mistakes as there is from positive experiences. For it is not only the concepts that come most quickly to mind that hold us in their grasp, and from which we try to shake free, but deeper, more ingrained standards that we may not initially think to question when perceiving, judging and acting. These are uncovered and explored by way of the kinds of intense discussion and conversations that occur in the study circles.

In describing this process, Paul Lample draws attention to an image, developed by Otto Neurath, that McDowell also uses to explain human learning. We are, as it were, at sea on a ship that we have to rebuild, one piece at a time, while still staying afloat. We replace by bits and pieces one timber of the ship—one concept, or group of concepts—after another, making gradual adjustments as we come to learn new ways of thinking about the world (174). "[T]hinking," as McDowell puts it, "is under a standing obligation to reflect about and criticize the standards

by which at any time, it takes itself to be governed" (*Mind and World* 81).

This work of rebuilding our "ship of concepts" is facilitated by the religious language at the center of the learning process being described here. By surfacing the spiritual nature of the world we have in view, and of the relationships between the realities within it, this language helps the mind advance in its understanding of the meaning of things, and thereby build sound concepts, new ways of perceiving the world (including other human beings). It develops our capacity to reason through the feelings, attitudes, beliefs, norms, values, and purposes that justify our actions. Our interactions with others can take on a sense and a feeling that is spiritual, not because we turn away from the material dimension, but because we come to see greater coherence between the material and the spiritual dimensions of reality. We develop finer discriminations in how we see and hear the world in both its material and spiritual aspects, relying on our rational faculties and capacities for knowledge as well as our capacities for feeling and purposefulness.

Genuine religious language is about unity, love and understanding, moral qualities, and the living of a life that moves a person closer to God. It is a language that deals with features of the world that can guide our perceptual attention, allowing us to see the world in the light of those spiritual qualities of love, mutual understanding, care, kindness, and justice. Throughout our involvement in this learning process, as our inherited conceptual frameworks come under scrutiny in the light cast by the language of Revelation, we learn to see with our "own eyes and not through the eyes of others," calibrating our capacity to exercise judgment, in recognition that "justice is [God's] gift to thee and the sign of [His] loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes" (Bahá'u'lláh, Arabic Hidden Words no. 4).[30]

'Abdu'l-Bahá writes,

> let them open wide their eyes and uncover the inner realities of all things,… Our spiritual perception, our inward sight must be opened, so that we can see the signs and traces of God's spirit in everything. Everything can reflect to us the light of the Spirit. (qtd. in Ruhi Institute 9)

From what has been described, it should be clear that in our involvement in this learning process, we need to adopt the scientific approach elaborated on earlier. Where scientists learn to look beyond the mere surface observations of the object world in order to determine the underlying forces and entities operating in nature, participants in this process learn to look beyond the surface of culture and external reality, and the limitations of that way of perception, opening their minds to a realm

30 For a discussion of the nature of this judgment, see John S. Hatcher's article in this issue, "The *Mizán* of Affect in Material versus Metaphysical Models of Human Consciousness."

of spirituality beyond nature. "It is common nowadays to think of science and religion as opposed. To the contrary, faith and reason are twins born of sameness and difference," write David and Ricardo Nirenberg (97). Science, in its determinate ways of knowing, represents an unquestionable advance for humanity, but religion in the form of the divine language of Revelation provides another avenue of knowledge and experience that complements, overlaps and extends the ways that science engages the world. Our understanding, whether in science, the arts, religion, or in the practical course of ordinary life, is always a capacity of human agency (or, we might say, the human soul)—an expression of a mind that finds itself in both an object world of spatially extended entities, energies and forces, but also in a space of non-physical abstraction and ideals. The advancement of human civilization depends on a deepening of our understanding, based on all capacities of mind: the instrumental and designative, but also the expressive, the cooperative, and the communicative, along with the mind's sense of value and purpose.

I have suggested here that interaction with the language of Revelation, particularly in a process of social learning with others, draws on and strengthens the capacities of the human mind in a way that can help us address our collective problems, and advance civilization. We may agree with this proposition, of course, without also believing that Revelation, or the specific claims it makes about reality, are true. I will conclude this paper, then, by considering whether a view of the mind that emerges from the Bahá'í writings is, if not demonstrably true in a scientific sense, capable of grounding the philosophical view of the mind presented thus far.

Part Six: The Mind and the Soul

A further question, then: Is it not time to recover a view that brings together an understanding of our range of mindful capacities for thought, feeling, expressiveness and purposefulness with a ready acceptance, too, of the limitations of mind before the infinite reality beyond the horizon of our finite and determinate knowledge?

The mind and, therefore, human action have a degree of freedom that lies outside the laws of causality that the natural and physical sciences generally take as given. While many contemporary philosophers persuasively argue that natural science is not enough to fully understand the human mind, the Bahá'í idea of mind goes a step further in holding that the mind has a relationship to the soul.

The mind may be dependent on the health of the brain and body, but it is not entirely of that world, for it reaches into a higher level of reality, however uncanny or other-worldly this may sound to philosophers. If we understand the supernatural correctly as a quality of spirituality and the true nature of the human spirit, we can attain to an understanding that both

recognizes the constraints imposed by nature, and the resulting importance of science and material means, and yet transcends those constraints in certain ways that rely on our learning from the language of divine Revelation.

Neuroscience and studies of animal cognition are, thus, certainly necessary and essential to human advancement. A scientific understanding of the brain serves to inform a better understanding of the mind.[31] Physical happenings affect the brain, causing changes in our minds. Lack of sleep, poor nutrition, and physical injuries provide all the evidence we need in this respect. It is also true that our conscious and unconscious choices—about what to think, how to judge, and what simple or complex actions we undertake (from drinking coffee to learning to ski downhill)—also cause changes in the physical state of the brain.[32] There are influences going both ways—brain to mind and mind to brain—but not all correlations amount to causal explanations. Davidson argues—effectively, in my view—that there are no psycho-physical laws: though some brain occurrences that then lead to mindful actions, and some mindful actions (the decision to drink coffee, for instance) impact the brain, there always remains a measure of free will. The brain is plastic and adaptable, and changes in the brain are often generated through deliberate practices—habits of will that lead to actions. Arendt similarly argues effectively that will is real, and is different from mere thinking. Human beings do manage to develop character and right conduct, and we all are witness to how these can often manifest themselves against terrible odds in the exigencies of human life.

We also recognize limitations that we cannot overcome in principle. Bahá'u'lláh comments on the limitations of any total understanding of the mind given its relationship with the soul, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá notes that "the uttermost limit of [the power of comprehension's] flight is to comprehend [only] the realities, signs, and properties of contingent things" (*Some Answered Questions* 58:3).

Writing to Dr. Auguste Forel, an early co-founder of the first neuron theory of the brain, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that "for the mind to manifest itself, the human body must be whole; and a sound mind cannot be but in a sound body." But He also made it clear that the mind, while "circumscribed", is also beyond the brain and body by the power of the soul:

> It is through the power of the soul that the mind comprehendeth, imagineth and exerteth its influence, whilst the soul is a power that is free. . . . The mind is circumscribed, the soul limitless.
>
> . . . all other beings, whether of the mineral, the vegetable or the animal world, cannot deviate from

31 Indeed, Shoghi Effendi writes that one of the important future pursuits of humanity will be "the sharpening and refinement of the human brain" (204).

32 See Sanjay Gupta's excellent summary of keeping the brain healthy in the aptly titled *Keep Sharp*.

> the laws of nature, nay, all are the slaves thereof. Man, however, though in body the captive of nature is yet free in his mind and soul, and hath the mastery over nature.

'Abdu'l-Bahá thus asserts that there is physical causality, or determinism, in the material realm, yet freedom, spontaneity and autonomy for the mind, however circumscribed or limited. This opposition between freedom and determinism has long been a conundrum in philosophy—how can they exist in the same world?

Yet nowhere do we find 'Abdu'l-Bahá bothered by this problem. He views our minds as straddling the physical and spiritual dimensions of a more extended reality encompassing both. In contemporary philosophy, too, there is greater acceptance of the compatibility of necessity and determinism in nature and the freedom of human mind and human action. This acceptance may stem in part from the realization of the impossibility, in principle, of ever arriving at an explanation of the totality of the physical and natural universe.[33] Nagel's idea of an "extended reality," some of which may be open to scientific discovery, but some remaining forever beyond science, or McGinn's "mysterium" in physical reality, forever beyond science, are useful ways of considering the impossibility of ever knowing everything about physical or natural reality.

Our human agency operates in a self-conscious way at a level above and beyond what natural or physical science can account for by mere description and explanation of causal mechanism. In considering how the mind develops a view of the world by way of its relationships with other minds through language and concepts, Pippin summarizes well the views of many other philosophers when he states that, "there is something about some human capacities that . . . will *never* be explicable scientifically, no matter our eventual knowledge of 'feedback loops' and brain reorganization" (*Interanimations* 65).

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes a similar point, yet draws a bolder conclusion:

> Man possesses conscious intelligence and reflection; nature does not. This is an established fundamental among philosophers . . . The ideal faculties of man, including the capacity for scientific acquisition, are beyond nature's ken. These are powers whereby man is differentiated and distinguished from all other forms of life . . . Notwithstanding the gift of this supernatural power, it is most amazing that materialists still consider themselves within the bonds and captivity of nature. (*Promulgation* 20:5)

An "intelligence" and "ideal faculties . . . beyond nature's ken" puts the mind, including its "capacity for scientific acquisition," beyond an explanation by

33 See footnote no. 23.

natural science. Many contemporary philosophers would agree with this assessment; but 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to the "supernatural" is a term philosophers resist. McDowell mentions the "supernatural" as an option for understanding the mind, but quickly dismisses it. He writes that we need not be bothered by "the fear of supernaturalism," and argues for an explanation of the human mind's uniqueness, however inexplicable by natural science, as a "second nature" (*Mind and World* 84).[34] Nagel considers "divine intervention" as one way to explain the evolution of the human mind but also sets it aside, opting instead for an understanding of mind that will have to wait for a currently unavailable, but he hopes eventual, scientific understanding of teleology that might explain the evolution of consciousness and mind (*Mind and Cosmos* 66–67). McDowell and Nagel both dismiss the "supernatural" and "divine intervention" based on a conventional understanding of the "supernatural." Yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá understands the "supernatural" as simply that which is beyond nature. Thus, a mind can be embedded in nature and the physical but also in a larger reality that also involves the spiritual. The material and spiritual are understood as dimensions of one single reality. This model is not any more "other-worldly" than any other that recognizes the immateriality of our consciousness, thought, feeling and purposefulness. It is a way of understanding realities of human life that are abstract and ideal, simultaneously beyond the natural world and yet immediately at hand in the commonplace experience of our mindedness or consciousness.

As Gabriel writes, "[a]s minded beings . . . we humans are in contact with infinitely many immaterial realities" (*Meaning* 9). These realities of mind can be called "spiritual" if "supernatural" is too far a reach, though "spiritual" may also raise objections in a culture that arguably lacks a strong sense of the sacred or the holy, and where material aspects of life eclipse the spiritual. Yet such realities of mind are "outside of nature," beyond the biological and natural, and though they may be immaterial in mind, once translated into human action they have effects on the world that always carry both material and human, or "spiritual," consequences.

To support the contention that the mind is in essence a spiritual or supernatural phenomenon, we can consider the insufficiency of considering the mind, or the human being, as a purely natural entity. As Pippin argues, human beings have "no naturally determined niche in the world" (*Interanimations* 24). We find our place in the harmonization of our interaction with the

34 McDowell relies on Wittgenstein's statement that, "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking" in order to justify his use of the term "second nature" but his point, like Pippin's, is that "commanding, questioning, recounting" are beyond the natural world by the uniqueness of our human mind.

physical world in which we are embodied, and of our purposes and intentions, meanings, norms and language that are thoroughly conceptual, abstract, and immaterial in both our individual and collective consciousness. The human creature is never a "natural man," as Hobbes and Rousseau both imagined for their differing arguments about human nature. The human cannot be natural, because, as argued at the outset of the paper, she does not live primarily in an environment, but in a world. The human being is able to conceive and inhabit alternative worlds and orders of reality, from the political to the moral and from the aesthetic to the spiritual, escaping the here and now of a natural life, living in worlds either shaped by inspiration or demeaned by a degraded imagination. What might be, what can be, and what is valuable and desirable in human life, always lies beyond our biological and bodily needs—yet such a human life must also serve those needs and be in harmony with the natural environment if we are to survive as a human race.

"Before all else, God created the mind." 'Abdu'l-Bahá cites this Holy Tradition on the first page of *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, and explains that "[t]his supreme emblem of God stands first in the order of creation and first in rank." He refers to "the intellect and wisdom" as "luminous lights", and states that "grace and splendour" derive "from wisdom and the power of thought." The mind is "the power of the human spirit . . . the light that shines from it" (*Some Answered Questions* 55:6). "The mind itself, reason itself, is an ideal reality and not tangible" (*Promulgation* 111:13). It is the human mind that generates "the sciences, arts, inventions, crafts and discoveries" (*Some Answered Questions* 48:4), "for it is only physically that man resembles the lower creation, with regard to his intellect he is totally unlike it" (*Paris Talks* 23:3).

The soul is spiritual and outside of nature, and so too is the human mind in its inseparable relationship to the soul. Unless we realize who we are as human creatures, different in kind and quality from animals, and from nature and the physical world, we will struggle to understand and embrace the responsibility that devolves upon us, as spiritual creatures, to look after the natural world as we should, preserving its integrity and health, while advancing our own health, spiritually and materially, personally and collectively.

> Walk thou high above the world of being . . . Those who have rejected God and firmly cling to Nature as it is in itself are, verily, bereft of knowledge and wisdom. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, Lawḥ-i-Hikmat ¶¶17–21)

In this rapid overview of the mind and the "power of the human spirit," much has been left unexplored. Of late, there has been an outpouring of thoughtful publications about consciousness, mindedness, sentience and sapience, wisdom and meaning, knowledge and sound reasoning. This

paper represents a modest effort at engaging in the philosophical discourse in this field. Philosophy itself remains a discipline within which many thinkers, though by no means all, maintain a level of respect for religion in spite of the advance of secularism. With that in mind, I hope that this paper may inspire Bahá'ís and like-minded individuals to read philosophy, including the works of philosophers who do not share their own views, trusting that continued earnest efforts from seekers of truth will advance our collective understanding of the relationship between human agency and the mind, casting light on the mind's relationship to the "human spirit" and "the rational soul."

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The *Mizán* of Affect in Material versus Metaphysical Models of Human Consciousness

JOHN S. HATCHER

> *True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.* —Bahá'u'lláh

Abstract

From the viewpoint of the description of the human reality in the Bahá'í authoritative texts, the essence of a human being is the soul, a metaphysical reality from which emanate all our distinctively human capacities. Unlike materialist views of the human reality, the Bahá'í teachings assert that our essence—the spiritual "self"—takes its beginning during the process of conception, whereupon it associates with the body so long as the physical temple remains capable of manifesting the reality and powers of the soul. Once the body/brain deceases, the soul dissociates from this relationship and exists and functions and progresses eternally. This hypothesis in no way diminishes the importance of a healthy brain as essential to our physical, intellectual, and spiritual development; indeed, it posits the brain as a transceiver by means of which the self manifests the soul's condition and development in action, speech, and comportment. Therefore, when the brain becomes dysfunctional, whether through trauma or mental illness, the transparency of the soul's relation to reality ceases. This paper explores the implications of this relationship for our understanding of emotion and presents a model for understanding the function of emotion as providing us essential feedback on, and guidance for, our lives, feedback whose ultimate purpose is to help us better calibrate our approach to spiritual growth. Given the brain-as-transceiver model, this emotional feedback is reliable only so long as the brain remains transparent in this systematic relationship. The paper suggests ways in which the model could inform approaches to treatment for affective disorders.

Résumé

Sous l'angle de la description de la réalité humaine dans les textes bahá'ís faisant autorité, l'essence de l'être humain est l'âme, une réalité métaphysique d'où émanent toutes nos capacités typiquement humaines. Contrairement aux conceptions matérialistes de la réalité humaine, les enseignements bahá'ís affirment que notre essence – le « moi » spirituel – prend naissance au cours du processus de conception, après quoi elle s'associe au corps aussi longtemps que le temple physique reste capable de manifester la réalité et les pouvoirs de l'âme. Lorsque le corps/cerveau décède, l'âme se dissocie de cette relation et continue d'exister, de fonctionner et de progresser éternellement. Cette hypothèse ne diminue en rien l'importance d'un cerveau sain, essentiel à notre développement physique, intellectuel et spirituel. En fait, elle postule que le cerveau est un émetteur-récepteur qui permet au moi de manifester l'état et le développement de l'âme dans l'action, la parole et le comportement. Par conséquent, si le cerveau devient dysfonctionnel, que ce soit à la suite d'un

traumatisme ou d'une maladie mentale, la transparence de la relation de l'âme avec la réalité cesse. L'auteur explore ici les implications de cette relation pour notre compréhension des émotions et présente un modèle permettant de comprendre leur fonction en tant que source de rétroaction essentielle sur notre vie et d'orientation de celle-ci. Le but ultime d'une telle rétroaction est de nous aider à mieux adapter notre approche en matière de croissance spirituelle. Eu égard au modèle considérant le cerveau comme émetteur-récepteur, la rétroaction émotionnelle n'est fiable que si le cerveau demeure transparent dans cette relation systématique. Le présent article propose des façons dont le modèle pourrait éclairer les approches du traitement des troubles affectifs.

Resumen
Desde la perspectiva de la descripción de la realidad humana en los textos autoritativos Baha'is, la esencia del ser humano es el alma, una realidad metafísica de la cual emanan todas nuestras capacidades distintivas humanas. A diferencia de las perspectivas materialistas de la realidad humana, las enseñanzas Baha'ís afirman que nuestra esencia- el ser espiritual- toma su origen durante el proceso de concepción, el momento desde cual se asocia con el cuerpo tanto tiempo como el templo humano se mantiene capaz de manifestar la realidad y los poderes del alma. Una vez el cuerpo/la mente fallece, el alma se desasocia de esta relación y existe y funciona, y progresa eternamente. Esta hipótesis de ninguna manera disminuye la importancia de un cerebro sano tan esencial a nuestro desarrollo físico, intelectual y espiritual; en efecto, sitúa al cerebro como un transmisor por medio del cual el ser se manifiesta la condición y el desarrollo del alma en acción, discurso, y comportamiento. Por lo tanto, cuando el cerebro se vuelve disfuncional, ya sea por medio de trauma o enfermedad mental, la transparencia de la relación del alma con la realidad deja de existir. Este artículo explora las implicaciones de esta relación para nuestra comprensión de la emoción y presenta un modelo para el entendimiento de la función de la emoción proveyéndonos retroalimentación y guía para nuestras vidas, una retroalimentación cuyo último propósito es ayudarnos a calibrar mejor nuestro abordaje del crecimiento espiritual. Con el supuesto modelo del cerebro como transmisor, esta retroalimentación emocional es confiable únicamente mientras el cerebro se mantiene transparente en esta relación sistemática. El artículo sugiere maneras en las cuales el modelo podría informar abordajes al tratamiento para trastornos afectivos.

I was once told by my own psychiatrist—a prominent specialist in anxiety and depressive disorders who has made outstanding contributions to scholarship in the field—that if I, as a competent writer, could accurately describe the subjective experience of depression or anxiety, I would make a million dollars. Whereupon I commented, "So you have never experienced these affective problems?" When he replied that he had not, two things became clear to me, which I shared with him. First, it was clear that while he did not want to suffer the agony, despair, and sometimes self-destructive emotions so often associated with these disorders, he longed to be able to comprehend more fully what his patients were enduring, all

the time realizing that, because of its entirely subjective nature, he could not.

Second, I immediately informed him that in spite of whatever talents I might possess as a writer, such a task could never be accomplished, because any effective description of this malady would necessarily require a comparison to some common experience. For example, I might convey some idea of what a panic attack feels like to a person who has never had one by likening it to being in an elevator whose cables snap, and which suddenly plummets, but without ever stopping. My listener, if they have a reasonably vivid imagination, will get a reasonable sense of the sensation I am describing. But with depression, no experience I have ever endured can be likened to it: it is *sui generis*, an incomparable sensation. The closest I might come to a description is that it is something like a desire to escape from one's self. I explained to my psychiatrist that not only are these sensations of anxiety, despair, and depression beyond the power of words, but they are incomparable to anything else one will ever have to endure. In short, "you have to be there." Some poets have come close to bridging this gap, but ultimately, true appreciation of and empathy for affective disorders can only be fully attained by a fellow wayfarer.

While the description of the subjective condition of depression is beyond me, what follows can be considered the reflections of a poet, not on this and other affective conditions themselves, but on a way of understanding them, informed by reflections on the model of reality presented in the Bahá'í writings. What I hope to convey is that our underlying understanding of reality, and in particular the reality of the human being, has meaningful consequences not only for our abstract understanding of the self, but for practical approaches to treating the affective disorders whose prevalence continues to rise in our communities.

In order to situate a Bahá'í model of consciousness and the self, it will be helpful first to consider as an alternative an extreme materialist position on consciousness—not necessarily because this is the view consciously espoused by most within the fields of neuroscience or psychology (though it is by no means absent), but because it helps cast the distinctiveness of a Bahá'í model in starker relief.

A materialist conception of neuroscience—that human consciousness is nothing but the product of the electro-chemical processes taking place in the three pounds of meat between our ears—can become the default way of thinking about consciousness, even for many of those who profess a belief in a spiritual understanding of the human reality. We may hardly question the materialist paradigm at all—even though most neuroscientists and philosophers agree that the existence of consciousness is still a "hard problem" (Chalmers 201)—and fall into thinking, speaking, and acting as though this physical device in our heads spontaneously creates consciousness, a "self" from which emanate the human powers of reason and imagination, of ideation

and will, of speech and emotion, and, most crucial of all, identity.

We may be inclined to accept—or at least rely on—this explanation for a number of reasons. One is that in its insistence on rooting the phenomenon of consciousness in purely material processes, this model associates itself with the materialist causality that we consider logical and scientific in other areas of investigation into physical reality. Additionally, the more we study the intricacy of the brain, the more astounded we are by its complexity. And with no end in sight to the discoveries being made about the brain's functioning, the claim that all the secrets of consciousness might be enfolded into its matter certainly seems plausible and satisfying. Parallel to these discoveries about the human brain are accelerating advances in computer science's development of artificial intelligence that may tempt the layperson to accept the notion of the human mind as a highly sophisticated machine¸ albeit a one constructed entirely of living tissue.

What is more, this materialist view of human consciousness and cognitive capacity seems to hold up in regards to our personal experiences. I see you come toward me, and I raise my hand in welcome. If we were to describe all the physical components of this simple act, we would need to write a considerable treatise; yet in the writing, we might well come to feel that we had successfully dissected the act into essentially deterministic processes of brain and body. The treatise would explain how abstract concepts (recognition, friendship) rest in language and ideation, noting where these faculties and capacities are generated and received in discrete areas of the human brain, and how they trigger the activation of muscles—almost instantaneously and without the apparent need for deliberation—to signal an equally abstract notion (welcome, affection) demonstrated through a symbolic gesture. This treatise might describe all of the elements contributing to the interaction, from various components of the central and peripheral nervous systems to the entire phenomenon of symbolic language conveying abstract concepts[1] in terms of purely material brain function.

This sense of self as the sum total of modular components interfacing in the brain seems confirmed further by the fact that when someone receives a traumatic injury to the brain, some or all of their essential "human" capacities become dysfunctional or entirely disabled. Similarly, in the experience of watching the advance of a neurodegenerative disease, such as Alzheimer's, in a loved one, we seem to observe their faculties diminish and their essential "humanness" and personality dissolve, until they are no longer recognizable as the person we once knew and loved. The conscious self seems irreparably lost, together with all the love and life experience and sense of self that formerly emanated from that physical

1 One of the major capacities that seems to distinguish us from any other life form on this planet. For further discussion, see Gerald Filson's "Mind, 'the Power of the Human Spirit'" in this volume.

construct. It would seem that by degrees, this once wondrous machine has ground to a halt, and with it the gradual effacement of what had been its most phenomenal output—the self, the personhood, and all the attendant human faculties and powers we once associated with a name, a face, a time, a place.[2]

Time and again we ponder how something so real, so palpable as personhood with all its quirks and skills—a human reality distinct from any other individual who has ever existed before or ever will again—could simply vanish into nothingness. Has this degenerative disease gradually destroyed the brain's capacity to create the "self"? Or has it simply dispelled the illusion that there was a self to begin with? After all, if the self is reducible to a physiological or bio-chemical event or sequence of events, then logic demands that the idea of the self as possessing an independent existence apart from these underlying processes would be entirely erroneous. Or is some other solution possible? Could it be that the self still exists, but can no longer manifest or communicate its reality through the intermediary of a malfunctioning system?

Metaphysics and Emotion

Those who disagree with a materialist neuroscientific paradigm—according to which our will, memory, emotion, and very consciousness are but products of the interaction among the various combinations of neurons—typically theorize that a metaphysical reality (the actual source of our essential reality or our "self") exists independently of our body. This same theory, especially as depicted in the Bahá'í texts, portrays the brain as an intricate intermediary between the self and physical reality. In effect, the brain is a transceiver whereby faculties such as will and imagination express themselves in physical action. In this same theory, the self and the spirit emanating from it maintain an associative relationship with the body/brain construct.

In this context, 'Abdu'l-Bahá distinguishes between acquired knowledge and the "existential" awareness of the physical self because "the spirit encompasses the body." He asserts that "the mind and the spirit of man are aware of all his states and conditions, of all the parts and members of his body, and of all his physical sensations, as well as of his spiritual powers, perceptions, and conditions." He concludes by noting, "This is an existential knowledge through which man realizes his own condition. He both senses and comprehends it, for the spirit encompasses the body and is aware of its sensations and powers. This knowledge is not the result of effort and acquisition: It is an existential matter; it is pure bounty" (*Some Answered Questions* 40:5).

Of course, while some scientists allow for the possibility of the existence of a metaphysical reality, their scientific training—with its disciplinary focus

2 Conversely, for an approach to this devestating condition from a spiritually informed point of view, see Ghadirian, *Alzheimer's Disease: An Eclipse before Sunset*.

on material causality—makes them reluctant to accept or even to postulate some possible interaction between the two expessions of reality, or at least some persistent, consistent, or predicable interplay, particularly an interplay whereby any metaphysical process or entity exerts a causal effect on material reality. From this alternative perspective, the brain remains the foundational source of human experience, though it might admit the possibility that some correlate of this human experience survives in the metaphysical realm—what we would call "the afterlife"—what we experience after the demise of the body/brain. Here we have a more moderate position than the extreme materialist one presented above, and perhaps a view that, in various shades and modulations, and with its terms more or less precisely mapped out, accomodates a broad range of not only neuroscientists and mental health professionals, but laypeople as well.

But in such a theory, could the entity that surives death be meaningfully designated as the "soul"? In addition, from such a view would this spiritual essence retain individuality together with memory, a sense of self, and thence experience relationships with other souls? Without the help of the brain's electrochemical processes where most neuroscientists believe memory resides, would this spiritual quiddity recall its former life? And being detached from the influence of affective checmicals such as serotonin, dopamine, adrenaline and oxytocin, could this enitity experience emotions? Furthermore, if this "afterlife self" is no longer capable of what we regard as fundamental human activities because it is deprived of the physical faculties that catalyze them, in what sense does this afterlife "self" experience existence, and in what way would such an afterlife experience even be desirable?

And then there are further questions of morality regarding any sort of relationship between how the self comported itself in its physical existence and what it experiences in this afterlife. Does its past performance affect what sort of experience it will encounter in the afterlife or what emotions it will feel if it is capable of reflecting on its past? In short, if we are bereft of memory and imagination, of will and reason, and are unable to experience various appropriate emotions, how could this metaphysical essence be considered "human" in any important sense? Indeed, such a being experiencing such an existence would even fall short of our current conception of the components of animal life in its most rudimentary forms.

The alternative metaphysical conception which such a paradigm—or the more strictly materialist paradigm presented initially—is often pitted against is one in which the metaphysical realm is imagined as so interpenetrating, and even dominating the material reality that physical laws and causality can be viewed as tenuous, and can be expected to be broken. This view holds that someone's will could influence other physical events besides one's own actions, the very process that most people

of faith presume occurs when they pray for the protection of a loved one or the felicitious outcome of some sequence of events, such as an intercession in physical events from a metaphysical source. This is a view that is almost entirely dismissed as wishful thinking, as mere superstition. In fact, a person of faith who indulges in such a prayer for intercession might in a different context—such as the workplace—find it quite irrational that there could be some consistent influence of metaphysical forces on material outcomes or metaphysical interference or interplay in physical deterministic events.

A Third Alternative

Religious philosophy—distinguishable from religious superstition in that it rigorously seeks to derive facts about metaphysical reality from clearly identified premises through logically sound inferences—offers a third alternative to the two we have posited. In this third paradigm, the two realities—or dual aspects of a single reality—possess a precise and predictable interaction.[3] The essential nature of existent beings is a non-composite metaphysical reality that expresses itself through the intermediary of a physical or composite analogous reality. Thus, while no two trees are exactly the same, every tree partakes of the metaphysical concept ("form" or "idea" in Platonic terms) of "treeness."

But since we are principally concerned with the nature of human reality, in this third paradigm we need to focus on how it presents the physical human temple as a construct, an amazingly variable biological contrivance designed to translate into all manner of physical expressions whatever the essential human reality (the metaphysical and non-composite essence of the self that is the human soul) is experiencing or attempting to accomplish. However, the paradigm that I propose in *Close Connections*, and which I here replicate, is based on inferences from the authoritative Bahá'í texts. But as I also note in that same discourse, the Bahá'í perspective—unlike most other religious, philosophical, or traditional views, portrays a relationship in which literally *all* major human capacities and powers—most especially those that distinguish human beings from all other life forms on this planet—derive from the soul, and in the physical realm are therebv conveyed both to others and to the conscious self through the intermediary of the complex human body operated by an even more complex brain.

In this configuration, then, the brain is not the ultimate source of those

3 A more complete discussion of this alternative appears in my work *Close Connections: The Bridge Between Spiritual and Physical Reality*. As I note in that study, this interaction can be understood on the largest and most expansive level of astrophysics, as well as on the most particulate level of quantum mechanics; my focus in this paper is on the way in which emotion functions or is communicated on both levels within the self of the human being.

faculties and capacities we ascribe to human beings: not memory, will, creativity, not rational thought, nor even emotion. Indeed, while emotion might seem somewhat tangentially related to these other faculties, it is one of the principal concerns of mental health professionals and, as we will see, one of the most significant indices to every other aspect of self. For while it may be trite and unambitious to assert that we desire "happiness" above all else, it is clear that, across time, place, and culture, positive emotions are amongst the things that human beings most desire and seek after: we all want a sense of well-being, self-respect, and peace of mind, even during those occasions when we may not be euphoric or "happy" in any ordinary sense of the term. Some of us may desire a sense of accomplishment, or nobility of character, a feeling of service to humankind, but in every one of these experiences, states of mind, or conditions of being, we are in fact responding to affective or emotional states of mind as essential indecies of how successfully we are navigating our lives. Stated directly, emotions serve as the principal feedback for our overall state of being inasmuch as they provide essential information for our knowledge or sense of self during every moment of our lives. They serve as gauges for the extent to which our actions and achievements comply with the expectations we have for ourselves, objectives that evolve over the course of our lives.[4]

The Brain as Mizán *in Paradigm Three*

A useful metaphor for reflecting on this relationship between our consciousness and reality itself is a commonplace conceit employed in Persian poetry—the *mizán*, the "standard" or the "balance." Originally a qur'anic term, *mizán* can be conceptualized as a set of balance scales (see for instance Qur'án 101:6–9). In our metaphor, these scales represent the brain. On the one side of the scales is objective reality and on the other is our conscious perception of it. When the scale is balanced, the brain could be said to have perceived

4 If we accept this concept of emotion, then wisdom suggests that we would no more consider "tinkering" with our emotional systems (with substance abuse or other activities that have the potential to encumber or injure the brain's capacitiy to become transparent in conducting emotions to the "self") than we would consider "toying" with our autonomic and peripheral nervous systems that keep us alive from moment to moment. This has implications for thinking about the Bahá'í stance on the use of mind-altering substances: those drugs which induce a false sense of well-being may be so deleterious to those who sincerely desire to attain intellectual, spiritual, or even physical development precisely because they distort the emotional signalling that should be conveying information to us. By the same token, as discussed below, where the emotional system is physiologically disregulated due to an underlying condition, a drug may, in a physician's considered opinion, be precisely what is needed to help restore accurate signalling.

and conveyed reality accurately to the conscious mind. However, if reality and our perception of it do not accord, we may conclude that the *mizán*, the brain, is not properly exercising its function: its conveyance of reality to our consciousness has become distorted. The scales need to be recalibrated.

Extending this conceit, we might add that in order for the scales to be a useful tool in evaluating reality, they first must be "zeroed out." With literal scales this is accomplished very simply: both sides are emptied, and the scale is adjusted until the balance bar is horizontal. Then a weight of pre-determined value is placed on one side, and the material to be weighed is placed on the other until the balance bar is again horizontal. If the weight or standard against which we are balancing the material is a one-pound weight, then we know that the material on the other side weighs one pound.

Of course, we assume that the "measure of things," the balance or standard against which we weigh a substance, is exactly what it claims to be—if it is meant to represent one pound, then we must have confidence that its maker did a competent job, for as Juvenal put it, "Who will judge the judges?" In this same context, the *mizán* or scales represent justice or a means of measuring justice in a given situation. For this reason, the statue of Lady Justice holds the *mizán* or scales of justice in one hand. As a symbol of the goal of judicial systems to assess or weigh a matter in the balance without prejudice, she is blindfolded to avoid bias: an action must be weighed against the standard or law, not the beliefs, opinions, or whims of the adjudicator.

Perhaps one of the most well-known uses of this term *mizán* in the context of Bahá'í texts is the famous closure to the pilgrim notes of May Maxwell. She quotes 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement about faith:

> And now I give you a commandment which shall be for a covenant between you and Me—that ye have faith; that your faith be steadfast as a rock that no storms can move, that nothing can disturb, and that it endure through all things even to the end; even should ye hear that your Lord has been crucified, be not shaken in your faith; for I am with you always, whether living or dead, I am with you to the end. As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the balance—this is the balance. (32)

'Abdu'l-Bahá here is describing the standard against which we should weigh or assess our own faith—"This is the balance."

A more widely known expression of the *mizán* or standard as regards human conduct is the so-called "Golden Rule," a succinct measure for how one should exercise justice in dealing with others. The biblical version in Matthew pertains to actions, and states that we should act towards others as we would want them to act towards us (Matt 7:12). But the standard for justice as stated in the Most Holy Book

of Bahá'u'lláh is even more exacting: "Wish not for others what ye wish not for yourselves" (Kitáb-i-Aqdas ¶ 148). In effect, the *mizán* or standard now requires that we not even countenance for another what we would not wish to befall ourselves, let alone commit any action that would prove injurious.

Thus we observe that the standard or balance or measure indicated by the concept of the scales of the *mizán* is more than a useful tool for justly valuing precious metals, such as gold; it also serves as a metaphorical tool for assessing spiritual behavior and—as is the case in our present discourse—for discerning the acuity of the brain in conveying accurately the condition of the self in relation to reality.

More specifically, the image of the *mizán* demonstrates how important it is for the brain to be able to provide accurate information, including emotional feedback, in order for us to make sound decisions. In this light, we can appreciate the danger of allowing the brain to deceive our sense of self by causing it to provide inaccurate feedback through indulging in alcohol or drugs. In effect, we are causing the brain to create the sensation of well-being or detachment from danger or sorrow. A problem occurs, however, when the effects of this inaccurate feedback have worn off: we find ourselves back in the very reality we were trying to escape. The end result is that we are tempted to attain the false sense of well-being by once again disturbing or altering the transparency of the brain's assessment of our reality. This precious *mizán* is out of kilter and will remain so until we muster the will power, or find the grace, to confront accurate information and respond accordingly by resolving our problems and willingly enduring the struggles that are presently besetting our reality.

The alternative—continuing to escape reality by obscuring the brain's transparency or accuracy as a *mizán*—means that if we ever do escape this addictive response to reality, it will be with an exponential increase in willpower and, most often, only with the assistance of others. The dangers of such activities—drugs, alcohol, and, in their own way, addictive activities such as gambling—that are capable of rendering the personal *mizán* of the brain defective and unreliable are such that Bahá'u'lláh has strictly forbidden them in His book of laws, The Most Holy Book.

The *Mizán* Model and Mental Health

Thus, in terms of applying this analogy to the brain, we are asserting that so long as the brain is functioning properly (with transparency), we can rely on it to provide us with a valid means by which we can perceive reality. And yet, how can we ever be completely sure that the brain is functioning with total accuracy, that our perception of reality is accurate and not a delusion or a misconception?

Insofar as many fundamental properties of reality are concerned, the Bahá'í accepts the standard of reality portrayed in the authoritative Bahá'í

texts as the pre-determined measure on the one side of the *mizán*—that standard against which one can accurately weigh one's concepts of "self," reality in both its physical and metaphysical dimensions, and the relationship between self and reality.

The same standard informs the work of a Bahá'í mental health practitioner who can employ this *mizán* to measure a patient's perception of reality. In particular, this assessment includes the patient's perception of the self. Of course, such an evaluation is a challenging task and must needs be approached with humility, and most especially with respect for the privileged insight into the inner world that patients alone possess. After all, none of us is capable of entering the consciousness of another human being in order to discover if their perception of reality complies with ours, or with the paradigm portrayed in the Bahá'í texts. And even if this were possible, we still could not be completely sure of the accuracy or inaccuracy of their perception of reality, because while we intend to weigh that perception against the standard of reality represented in the Bahá'í writings, what this means in practice is weighing the other person's perception against our own. And while we may strive to bring our own perception into line with our understanding of the Bahá'í writings, we know that this understanding is always partial, and never free from error. Our intuitive sense that our views are accurate or in accord with reality must always be tempered by an awareness that our own perception will never be complete or flawless.

On the one hand, it is not the purpose of this examination of the metaphor of the *mizán* in relation to the brain to evaluate its application to all mental health issues—such as schizophrenia or dementia where there exists stark and obvious discrepancy between the patient's perceptions (whether of self or of reality in general) and our collective understanding. Neither will we employ this analogy to examine mental health conditions attributable to obvious physiological conditions, such as brain trauma. Where this model (conceit or analogy) will prove to be more useful is in those mental health questions that fall less squarely within the medical wheelhouse of physical cause and effect—chemical imbalance and structural irregularity, for example.

Consequently, let us focus on *affective disorders* which, while they may certainly have a range of physical correlates and contributing factors, also involve how the patient's subjective perceptions arise from their underlying assumptions and beliefs about reality, as well as from habits of thought—factors, in other words, that a patient is at least theoretically capable of gradually modifying through being guided to alter thinking, even if the extent of this remediation will vary from one individual to another. In such cases, which may include depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, trauma and stressor-related disorders, eating disorders, self-harm, and—in some cases and to a certain extent—substance abuse disorders, the mental health professional is dealing with a somewhat more delicate

and subtle detection of miscalibration of the *mizán* related to affect or emotion.

I also feel it important to note that this choice of focus is not merely theoretical, but is significantly informed by my personal experience which, as I suggest at the outset of this paper, has provided insights that I have come to believe are largely inaccessible to those who have not had to endure such afflictions—whether they be anxiety disorders, depression, and the like. These kinds of affective disorders are so entirely subjective that even the health professional, who through specialized study can not only recognize these afflictions but become capable of assisting the patient in dealing with them or even largely overcoming them, cannot entirely understand or appreciate the affective experience unless the professional has also endured these disorders.

For this reason, we can readily appreciate the power of sharing within a group that does have these experiences in common—whether among soldiers suffering from PTSD who have seen and done what the human psyche was never intended to experience, or among those addicted to various forms of substance abuse whose lives will forever circumambulate the unrelenting siren call of total escape from reality.

While it is thus important to acknowledge that every person's experience with affective disorders is unique to them, it is my hope that sharing this notion of the *mizán* model might be of value in helping others appreciate the war that friends and relatives enduring such afflictions are waging inside. If nothing else, such understanding may help us all become stalwart companions and compassionate listeners.

A Plague Upon Our Houses

One might correctly characterize the present-day widespread nature of affective disorders as a pandemic, even though we have only in the last decades become aware of the historical prevalence of such disorders, especially among those of delicate sensibilities—artists and poets, for example—and people subject to historical instances of disorder brought about by natural disasters and the "unnatural" disasters of war and such.

And in the exponentially accelerated increase in social and environmental change that peoples worldwide are presently experiencing as social order seems be unravelling at a perilous rate, we may feel some legitimate sense of valor if we and our family are managing to endure this pandemic of affective disorders successfully. I dare say there are few who do not know a friend or family member who is having to wage war against such afflictions.

Nevertheless, as a society, we desperately need to become aware of the prevalence of affective disorders, to cease characterizing such afflictions as a sign of weakness, and to learn as much as we can about how to assist those undergoing this struggle, especially our own family members and close friends. As my previously cited

physician helpfully explained to me, the patient and the caregiver need to appreciate these affective disorders as diseases and treat them accordingly, for that is precisely what they are.

He went on to explain that we should not disdain those enduring these maladies any more than we would one suffering from diabetes, whether the principal cause of such a disorder is a chemical imbalance or malfunction in the brain, some kind of personal trauma, or the increasing decline in the social environment, whether of family or more encompassing types of social systems.

The increase we are witnessing in affective disorders is not explained merely by advances in data collection. For example, there is reliable evidence of a gradual but marked increase among college students in affective disorders over the past decades, with a study finding that by 2013 fully half of American college students met the criteria for one or more mental health problems—a proportion that rose to over 60% by 2020 (Lipson et al.). In reporting on this study, the American Psychological Association noted that despite some positive developments, including the progressive lessening of the stigma around mental health issues, this epidemic is overwhelming available resources (Abrams).

Theoretical Paradigms and Proper Treatment

To diagnose and treat affective disorders successfully, the mental health professional first needs to understand the foundational makeup of human affect itself. It should be clear that our model of human nature, and the role of affect within it, will have implications for treatment. In the case of the materialist paradigm described above, for instance, if our conscious self is merely a biochemical construct, then a comfortable affective state may well be our sole objective—why not make the illusion of selfhood as pleasant, or pain-free, as possible, regardless of whether or not the brain is functioning as a *mizán*—as an accurate or transparent transceiver of reality? In this case, directly manipulating the affective state through pharmaceutical or other means might seem to be a rational approach.

Conversely, if the self is a metaphysical essence, and emotion is information about the condition of that self, then any alteration of affect through biochemical means would hardly change the condition of the human being. Such a remedy would simply pervert or alter the ability of the self to be aware of its own condition. It would be akin to severing a nerve to treat a broken leg. The pain might be gone, but is the problem solved?

Obviously, few professionals would recommend overriding the valuable information emotion gives us about our self, regardless of whether they consider the essential nature of the human being to be a composite biochemical construct, or a metaphysical essence that communicates to physical reality through the complex operation of the brain. However much we may agree or

disagree about the essential nature of reality, we generally agree that reality exists and that our emotions are valuable indices about how we are coming to terms with the relationship between our self and reality as our self traverses the myriad paths of our life's journey, struggling as we proceed to discover life's meaning and the particular purpose this venture holds for us—what distinct abilities we might have and what special services we might render others.

The first step, then, is to determine the extent to which the affective state complies with reality—the extent to which the biochemistry of the brain is an accurate index to what the individual should be feeling or experiencing. Like the balance scales, we want to weigh reality as it is against reality as the affective systems are portraying it to us. Only then can any remedial response be determined. Just as an orthopedist will take an x-ray to determine if the pain emanating from the leg is indicative of a broken bone, so the mental health professional will, in the case of depression, for example, assess the extent to which the affective condition is an accurate index or response to a situation worthy of depression.

For example, two individuals may present similar symptoms of depression, but if one has recently suffered the loss of a loved one while the other has no apparent life circumstances that correlate to the depression, it would be foolhardy to treat them in the same manner. The emotional pain of one may be no less real than that of the other, but the approach to resolving, managing, or otherwise responding to it should differ.

Even if information about reality is being accurately conveyed—the patient is depressed in response to identifiable circumstances—the patient might require a palliative to withstand the emotional pain they are experiencing, even as the patient with the broken leg might require medication for a period in order to endure physical pain. But when, upon examination, reality is shown not to be as perceived and portrayed by the patient—there is nothing in the experience of the patient to warrant the extreme distress—the psychologist or psychiatrist may conclude that the problem is with the intermediary communication between reality and the conscious mind. Some part of the affective system is not working properly. Or to continue with our analogy, the *mizán* of the brain is not calibrated accurately. With this framework in mind, we can consider some of the treatments currently available for affective disorders, bearing in mind the distinct goals of treatment in each case outlined above: palliation in the one case, re-calibration of the *Mizán* in the other.

Pharmacology to the Rescue?

With the epidemic of depressive disorders developing over the past several decades, research and, consequently, advances in psychiatric treatment have also grown apace. Where once electroconvulsive therapy was a primary

treatment modality for various psychiatric conditions, various tranquilizers of the benzodiazepine variety were introduced, beginning with chlordiazepoxide (Librium) in 1960, diazepam (Valium) in 1963, clorazepate in 1967, and many others. These were found to be successful in helping to abate forms of anxiety disorders, panic attacks, and a wide range of other affective disorders or related problems such as insomnia, muscle spasms, and alcohol withdrawal (Committee on Review of Medicines).

The downside of these treatments became rapidly apparent. They are addictive. They were overprescribed and, in many cases, almost cavalierly over-administered, often by general practitioners with little or no background in affective disorders. They were prescribed without a complete history of the patient's disorder or, in far too many cases, without even a cursory understanding as to whether or not an affective disorder existed in the first place (Anderson).

Stated in terms of our ongoing theme, since the *mizán* was often not adequately assayed, this category of anti-depressants (which soon became commonly known as "mood-lifters" or "brighteners," as their effect is comparable to the euphoria experienced after a couple of alcoholic drinks) really did little to correct the problem at hand, but simply masked it. In cases of anxiety or panic attacks, the patient might have gained some sense of control—the symptoms might be lessened—but the underlying condition was not addressed. At the time when these drugs became available, depression was not yet even clearly conceptualized as a medical problem, and still today, the medical profession continues to struggle to gain an entirely accurate overview of the nature of affective disorders.

Affective Disorders as Disease?

Around the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, there appeared a significant breakthrough in the pharmacological treatment of clinical depression. The newly developed category of pharmaceuticals known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's) went to the very source of the false (or at least unbearable) information the affective system was conveying to the conscious self. By actually slowing down the speed with which neurotransmitters (particularly serotonin) cross the synaptic cleft, this category of antidepressant does not mask or benumb an existing emotion—it actually causes a different, and, we might hope, "correct" emotion to take its place. If in fact the depression was due simply to a biochemical error, then presumably the *mizán* is now balanced.

For a good many of those enduring the unspeakable anguish of clinical depression, the experience of taking SSRI's is like unto the gradual lifting of a veil, a pall that beclouds one's experience of every aspect of reality at every waking moment. However, over-prescription, and improper or uninformed administering of these drugs,

began relatively early and continue to this day. The incredibly serious adverse side effects of improper or uninformed prescription of these drugs include intensification of the disorder, the introduction of other forms of affective disorders, and even death by suicide. Such is the case, for example, when SSRIs are given to those suffering from depression resulting from bipolar disorder, an affective condition that requires a totally different array of pharmacological treatments.

Complementary Models of Human Emotion

But our purpose here is not to analyze the pharmacological treatment of depressive disorders or any of the other affective disorders that seem to have reached epidemic proportions in contemporary society. Neither is it our intent to consider the plethora of obvious stresses caused by the pace and tenor of contemporary society and the instability and dysfunction of common human relationships, worthy and important as these topics may be.[5] Rather, our central purpose is to assess how we can still consider the conscious self as essentially a metaphysical essence even while it seems to be obviously influenced by the physically-based affective system functioning via the physical entity that is the brain.

More specifically, in order to justify the utility of the *mizán* model, we need to build an understanding of human emotion that is coherent with the paradigm in which the essentially metaphysical self is impacted by physical interventions. Let us, then, briefly consider the "affective system" in somewhat the same methodical way as we might approach the other constituent systems of the human reality before we discuss the efficacy of the third paradigm with regard to emotions as an essential index to our sense of self.

Knowledge of Self and the Purpose of Creation

The authoritative texts of the Bahá'í Faith contain a detailed and rationally consistent discussion of the construction of this third paradigm of the self. A description of the Bahá'í model of the reality of the self can begin with the axiom that there are two counterpart expressions of reality: the essential, non-composite, metaphysical or spiritual realm and the created, composite or physical expression or manifestation of that same spiritual realm.

The Bahá'í texts repeatedly note that creation is one, that while having various expressions or dimensions, the entirety of reality is an organic and integrated expression of the divine

5 The growing environmental stress we experience has been increasingly noted by thinkers and researchers within both psychology and social science. More than five decades ago, the term "future shock" was coined by Alvin Toffler in his book of the same title to describe our increasing inability to process change in an essentially unstable social environment where reality no longer stays constant for significant periods of time.

will. In short, while the metaphysical expression of reality has primacy in this relationship, these dual expressions of reality are unified as the exact counterparts of each other: "The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. They are the exact counterpart of each other. Whatever objects appear in this world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 10).

The consequences of this fundamental verity are weighty. For example, if the realm of the spirit is without beginning or end, without limit in plenitude or variety, then the physical world that mirrors forth that reality as an "exact counterpart" must likewise possess these same attributes of transcending limits of time or number, a conclusion confirmed throughout the Bahá'í texts.[6]

A second related axiom from the Bahá'í concept of cosmology and theology as related to the notion of "self" is that both realms are the purposeful and conscious emanation from an intelligent[7] Being whose reality we can only vaguely comprehend. In short, all creation is the willful expression of the character and nature of God. A corollary of this fact is found in Bahá'u'lláh's allusion to reality in the following verse He cites from the Imám 'Álí: "No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it" (*Gleanings* 90:1).

The logical extension of this axiom is that everything in creation in both realms of existence has as its essential reality the expression of the attributes of the Creator, each according to its ability: "From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God. So potent and universal is this revelation,

6 See, for example, Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, chapter 78.

7 Descriptions of a "personal God," with attributes that permit us to conceptualize and relate to the deity as a person, can risk leading us to an anthropomorphized conception of God, one which the Bahá'í Writings unequivocally reject. While we must attempt to describe God for certain purposes, it may be helpful to keep in mind as we do so 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reminders that while we can logically attribute to God qualities found in creation, we cannot hope to comprehend what those qualities entail at the level of the Divinity. "[T]hese attributes and perfections that we recount of the Divine Essence, these we have derived from the existence and observation of beings, and it is not that we have comprehended the essence and perfection of God" (*Tablet to Auguste Forel*). Rather than imagine God as a scaled-up version of a human being, we can reflect that our conceptions of intelligence, will, etc. represent mere signs or reflections of an Intelligence and Will to which we have no access, and which exist more fully than we do: "It is evident that whatsoever man understands is a consequence of his existence, and that man is a sign of the All-Merciful: How then can the consequence of the sign encompass the Creator of the sign?" (*Some Answered Questions* 37:3).

that it hath encompassed all things visible and invisible" (*Gleanings* 90:1).

This statement about creation's relationship with God connects to a third, somewhat more subtle axiom about the purpose of creation. Why has the Creator determined to bring forth creation in the first place? The very purpose of the existence of anything can, on one level, be understood as its expression of something about the Creator. This verity asserts that the motives of the Creator are entirely altruistic. He creates nothing for His own benefit, selfish desire, aggrandizement, or need, nor so that He might be praised by all that proceeds from Him. He is, instead, totally autonomous, self-sufficient, independent, and essentially incomprehensible to all but Himself. By this is meant that no being is capable of comprehending His essence, nor does the knowledge or love of God require such a complete understanding, nor does He desire or demand obeisance or acquiescence. Rather, His desire as explained in the Bahá'í texts is that the most exalted expression of His creation—the human being—come to comprehend, and thence to express to some extent, the divine attributes with which the Creator has adorned us.

Possibly the most succinct statement of this divine purpose is found in a well-known Islamic tradition (or *ḥadí<u>th</u>*), the tradition of the "Hidden Treasure": "I was a Hidden Treasure. I wished to be made known, and thus I called creation into being in order that I might be known" (qtd. in Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas n. 23). Bahá'u'lláh expands on this same verity in the fourth Arabic Hidden Word where He equates this knowledge with love, or implies that the authentic knowledge of God will, by means of the magnetic attraction of His perfections together with recognition of His relentless love for us, necessarily result in our attraction to Him and, subsequently, our adoration or love of God: "I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life."

This axiom is subtle because we naturally want to know *why* the Creator loves our creation and wishes to be loved in return if all His motives are entirely altruistic. Furthermore, we know from other passages that this wish or desire is not some sudden impulse but an inherent and inalienable attribute of the Creator—indeed, the very reason He bears the appellation "Creator." Therefore, creation has always existed and will continue to exist and to develop because this attribute will never cease.

But at the heart of the answer to this enigmatic question is the Creator's knowledge of Himself. Because He understands and possesses and is the source of all divine attributes, He is fully aware of His own worth as well as the value, benefit, and joy another being would experience were it capable of coming to recognize His attributes and, upon recognizing His love for us, return that love and thereby establish a love relationship, which, by definition, is bidirectional or reciprocal.

For this reason, God has created beings capable of accomplishing this task, and has established an elaborate and logically devised education system (physical reality) whereby this knowledge can be acquired, on both an individual and on a collective level. What is more, this educational methodology instigates a process whereby this knowledge increases systematically by degrees over time.

Perhaps the best way for us to acquire an intimate, subjective comprehension of this motive force is through our own desire to create and, subsequently, to love—whether intellectually or physically. We have, the Bahá'í writings assert, an inherent love of reality, an attraction derived from the fact that all things in their inmost essence testify to the nature of the Creator. Furthermore, because we are inherently attracted to everything that reminds us of our own nature and the nature of the Source of our own emanation, nothing will provide us with sustaining joy except the extent to which we are acquiring these same divine attributes as they are manifest in creation, in ourselves, and in our relationships with others and with creation as a whole.

Stated more axiomatically, we are possessed of an insatiable attraction to, or love for, all that reminds us of our origin, a drive or desire that can be satisfied by nothing less than our coming to understand the source of that attraction and gradually acquiring those attributes, which come to shape our thoughts, words, and conduct. This authentic affection is the awareness of loving that which is worthy of our love and of being loved by that Being Who is the source of our longing.

This brings us, then, to the axiom found in the epigram to this article, which combines the purpose of our creation with the subject at hand—the attempt to gain knowledge of the "self." Bahá'u'lláh pronounces as a bald fact that "[t]rue loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self" (*Tablets* 156).

The reason for this assertion is made clear throughout the writings of Bahá'u'lláh: if we are inherently desirous of knowing the Creator—a process we pursue in our love of creation itself which bears the imprint of the Creator—then we are necessarily attracted to and satisfied by the most complete, complex, and perfect expressions of the attributes of the Creator. And according to Bahá'u'lláh, the human being is the most perfect and complete expression of God or Godliness in creation. Bahá'u'lláh observes that "whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light" (Kitáb-i-Íqán 100). But His conclusion to this assessment of the spiritual nature of creation is His pronouncement that "[t]o a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed

all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him" (Kitáb-i-Íqán 101).

Bahá'u'lláh continues this theme and concludes with a *ḥadí̲th̲* that succinctly and axiomatically sums up the reciprocal relationship between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the "self" in whom are "potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed" (Kitáb-i-Íqán 101): "In this connection, He Who is the eternal King—may the souls of all that dwell within the mystic Tabernacle be a sacrifice unto Him—hath spoken: 'He hath known God who hath known himself.'" (101–102).

Some Inferences from this Syllogism

For our present purposes, the most relevant conclusion we can draw from this sequence of causally related axioms about human nature and human purpose is that the acquisition of knowledge of the self must necessarily be an indirect process. The essential reality of the human being is a metaphysical soul, but since the soul operates in this life through the intermediary of a physical temple, we must learn about the self through the daily experience of associating with that reality by means of metaphorical or symbolic access and exercises.

Bahá'u'lláh affirms that the soul's ability to outwardly express its capacities depends, in this life, upon the quality of the connection between the metaphysical essence and the physical temple. This expression can be impaired due to infirmities in the body, including the brain, or even severed entirely:

> Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man. Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose, thy sight and hearing, thy sense of smell and power of speech, and whatever else is related to, or transcendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty. So closely are they related unto it, that if in less than the twinkling of an eye its relationship to the human body be severed, each and every one of these senses will cease immediately to exercise its function, and will be deprived of the power to manifest the evidence of its activity. It is indubitably clear and evident that each of these afore-mentioned instruments has depended, and will ever continue to depend, for its proper functioning on this rational faculty, which should be regarded as a sign of the revelation of Him Who is the sovereign Lord of all. Through its manifestation all these names and attributes have been revealed, and by the suspension of its action they are all destroyed and perish. (*Gleanings* 83:1)

From this passage, then, it is apparent that since the expression of our core rational faculty in this life through our senses and powers is mediated by the body, our capacity to manifest physically any of these capacities terminates when this associative relationship between body and soul ceases. A corollary of this observation is that, at that same instant, the conscious mind and all other powers of the self are freed from the indirect relationship with and perception of reality. Most important to the theme of this discourse, emotion, as one of the essential faculties of the spirit or soul, is no longer dependent after the death of the body on the accuracy or health of the biochemical replication of affect through the brain. Instead, our emotions, once dissociated from the body-brain, will be experienced directly without being subject to environmental or other physiological influences capable of distorting or confusing our affective response to the condition of the "self." Instead, the conscious self, as a spiritual essence no longer constrained by an associative or periscopic relationship with reality, will have direct access to metaphysical reality—what the Bahá'í scriptures sometimes refer to as "the heavenly realm," "the world of the Kingdom," or "the world of vision":

> There, in the realm of vision, the soul sees without the help of the physical eye, hears without the aid of the physical ear, and travels without dependence upon physical motion. It is, therefore, clear that the spirit in the soul of man can function through the physical body by using the organs of the ordinary senses, and that it is able also to live and act without their aid in the world of vision. This proves without a doubt the superiority of the soul of man over his body, the superiority of spirit over matter. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 86)

Interestingly, there are passages in the Bahá'í writings suggesting that, to a degree at least, the soul is capable of attaining some measure of this direct access to reality even in this life:

> Just as man has been physically born into this world, he may be reborn from the realm and matrix of nature . . . In this second birth he attains the world of the Kingdom . . . Great discoveries and revelations are now possible for him; he has attained the reality of perception; his circle of understanding is illimitably widened; he views the realities of creation, comprehends the divine bounties and unseals the mystery of phenomena. This is the station which Christ has interpreted as the second birth. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 332)

This highlights the reality that, from a Bahá'í perspective, the soul associates with a body during this life but is in no way *in* the body: from its inception it already dwells within the metaphysical realm, even though it is shielded

or veiled from its own reality until dissociation from the physical body takes place.

Indeed, although attaining "the reality of perception" may be possible in this life, it is by no means a given. Inasmuch as our conscious self must understand its essential reality indirectly so long as it endures an associative relationship with the human brain, our understanding of our own essential reality in this life is intrinsically capable of becoming confused, distorted, or even obliterated.

Conversely, while the idea of attaining direct access to reality, including our own self, may seem attractive to some, others may share the fear articulated by Hamlet, by which he rules out suicide as a solution to his own despair: the possibility that the "self" lives on beyond the demise of the physical temple, and that the affective senses are no less active after death, "makes us rather bear those ills we have/ Than fly to others that we know not of" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, I, ll 80-81). We can presume that after physical death, upon becoming detached from the indirect experience of reality through the sometimes faulty or diseased apparatus that is the body—the metaphorical expression of self—our affective sense of self is now completely accurate. But what if the anxiety or despair we felt in the physical stage of our existence was the result of internal disorder, some malfeasance or misuse, abuse, or conscious ungodly action on our part? What if, once our emotions are fully accurate in their conveyance of what we feel and how intensely we should feel it, we discover that we *should* feel bad about ourselves, that our anxiety and despair are warranted reactions to how we have lived?

Here we do well to recall the statement in the Bahá'í writings—and seemingly confirmed by those who have experienced near-death experiences—that in the process of transitioning to the next stage in the life of the soul, we are made to review our past life, and to evaluate how we have done in terms of what we should have done, in terms of what we had every opportunity to understand to be the right path, the proper course of action. Bahá'u'lláh cautions us in Arabic Hidden Words no. 31, "Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds."

Of course, it is also clear that, even as change is an inalienable property of physical existence, so this same condition is operant in the realm of the spirit—which is the "real world." Consequently, while one's initial sense of self might be regret, despair, anxiety, or depression, such a condition need not endure. Even as 'Abdu'l-Bahá notes, our self (and logically, therefore, our sense of self) can become changed in the next life, both through the prayers of others, the mercy of God, and through our own willful contrition and prayers for assistance:

> It is even possible for those who have died in sin and unbelief to

> be transformed, that is, to become the object of divine forgiveness. . . . They must therefore be able to progress in that world as well. And just as they can seek illumination here through supplication, so too can they plead there for forgiveness and seek illumination through prayer and supplication. Thus, as souls can progress in this world through their entreaties and supplications, or through the prayers of holy souls, so too after death can they progress through their own prayers and supplications, particularly if they become the object of the intercession of the holy Manifestations. (*Some Answered Questions* 62:7).

The Affective Sense of Self

With this background established, we can now explore the implications for our affective sense of self of the indirect, physically-mediated nature of our relationship to our metaphysical essential self. Arguably nothing is more important to our sense of self than our emotional or affective condition. Indeed, we would be hard put to segregate our continuous evaluation of our self (our sense of well-being, self-worth, and so on) from the emotional indices to these states of being. In other words, how we feel, and in particular how we feel about ourselves, has a preponderating influence on how we view and understand our selves.

Consider those situations in which we endure great suffering in order to assist someone else or to uphold some worthwhile cause. The suffering will feel bad, on some level; but on a deeper emotional level, we have sufficient affective support of our chosen course of action—some sense of self-worth or nobility—to offset whatever pain or discomfort we might have to endure to carry out these efforts. In fact, we might say that, in such cases, the suffering is relegated to physical sensation, not an affective state of being. We know we are doing "the right thing," and we feel emotionally comforted by this understanding, sufficiently so that even our physical discomfort may be totally assuaged by these ultimately more powerful sensibilities.

But the epidemic of affective disorders currently plaguing our society demonstrates the need to have a means of diagnosing and treating dysfunctional affective systems, or affective systems that are stressed beyond their capacity to deal appropriately with the toil of daily life.

As noted above, from a strictly materialist point of view, this problem might seem rather simple to resolve. If our affective system is in a constant state of depression, we can chemically alter the relay of neurotransmitters across the synaptic cleft so that the biochemical construct of the "self" is no longer in despair. And yet, the cause of that affective state—whether an underlying physical dysfunction or a set of life circumstances—will not have changed. The apparently successful short-term strategy of letting the affective system convey information

distorted by chemical manipulation (for the purpose of assuaging pain) may in fact work against the better, long-range objective of making the affective system function correctly by conveying authentic information about reality to our conscious self.

To reiterate a point we made earlier, pharmacological remedies might make one feel elation even when reality dictates that sadness or remorse or grief or despair are precisely the correct emotional indices to what one is experiencing in relation to reality. Of course, this correlation will depend on how wisely the medications are employed. Contemporary SSRI's are intended to be used to help the brain convey reality correctly. Other methodologies or pharmaceuticals might serve to help the individual endure the overwhelming conditions of reality when such remedial assistance is appropriate.

Therefore, let us consider how methodologies, whether discursive or biochemical, can be employed, both to diagnose and to treat some common affective disorders, in a way that reflects an awareness that the true "self" is a metaphysical essence.

The Healing Arts

When we speak of health and healing, whether of the body or the mind or the spirit, we do well to reflect on the numerous statements attributed to Socrates, whose dialogues with his followers often focus on those professions and "arts" that are of benefit to humankind—educational systems and learning, political systems and governance, legal systems and justice, medicine and the art of healing. In these discussions, Socrates demonstrates that what is logically the best course of action for the practitioner of an art (the teacher, the judge, the doctor) might seem the precise antithesis of a proper course of action to the one whose condition is in a state of need, dysfunction, or disrepair: the student, the criminal, or the patient.

Thus, while the criminal might desire forgiveness and pardon, he might benefit more from punishment in order that he might understand what he did wrong and refrain from actions that impede his development. Likewise, the student might wish simply to absorb and retain the information that the teacher imparts. Whereas Socrates notes that true learning requires effort on the part of the student and participation in the process (the Socratic method), so that the teacher is, according to Socrates, like a midwife bringing forth the birth of insight by assisting the student in probing reality. In a similar way, the remedy the skilled physician prescribes might seem unpalatable to the patient who is in a compromised state of health, especially if the remedy does not result in swift and easy recovery.

But at the heart of all Socratic discourse is the acknowledgment that the successful application of all arts devised to assist humanity is entirely predicated on accurate knowledge of the essential nature of human beings. As Socrates teaches his students, one

can hardly apply an efficacious remedy to someone without knowing what is ultimately propitious, what is healthy, what advances the "essential self" or soul. Consequently, one cannot know what the condition of health is until one is aware of the nature, purpose, and destiny of the human being, even as one could not nurture a seed into a thriving plant without knowing what sort of plant the seed is to become and what particular treatment will assist the seed in coming to fruition and attaining its potential.

For Socrates, the true nature of the human being parallels almost precisely what we have thus far depicted as the "third" paradigm, the Bahá'í notion of the essential self—that the human "self" is essentially spiritual. Within this paradigm, what might be temporarily discomfiting, experientially and emotionally, might be the very best means for the self to attain health. This concept of health and healing is analogous to the knowledge required to train an athlete. While the novice or untrained coach might believe the best approach is to treat the athlete with kindness and not to do anything that would be stressful or uncomfortable, the experienced trainer will wisely accustom the athlete under his tutelage to endure incrementally increased physical stress on a daily basis in order to make the body stronger and more adept.

By such a method, the dedicated athlete will, in due course, begin to perceive the stress of training as a positive experience, not only cognitively but emotionally as the brain releases endorphins to reward the conscious self, to signal that this activity is healthful and worthy of a sense of well-being and personal achievement.

Naturally, this principle of healing or training does not imply that no benefit can be derived without a precise knowledge of the nature of the one being helped. For example, if the patient is in severe pain, administering a palliative might be the most desirable course of action from the patient's perspective, and one the physician should assist with; but discovering the ultimate source of the pain and curing the ill or dysfunction that is producing this information should clearly be the weightier objective for the caring and competent physician.

The same process applies in the treatment of affective disorders. There may be a need first to manage the emotion (delusion, guilt, remorse, depression, anger, resentment, etc.) or to alleviate the immediate pain if, for instance, the patient is simply unable to cope, and might even be inclined to take some drastic course of action in order to escape what might seem to be an unbearable emotional state. However, it is imperative that the healer not be satisfied with mere alleviation of symptoms, but rather try to determine if the possible source of these symptoms is indeed an emotional disorder or, on the contrary, whether they are an appropriate response to objectively overwhelming circumstances. In other words, the physician should try to determine whether or not the *mizán* of the brain is properly calibrated.

For example, if we feel immense distress because we are not living up to expectations we have for ourselves (whether the result of our personal aspirations or imposed on us by others), we could be assisted (1) to apply our will to change our expectations, (2) willfully to raise our performance to comply with our expectations, or (3) to modify the emotional results of this conflict through pharmacological assistance or counseling.

For example, let us consider the case of a soldier racked with guilt at having taken the life of another. The combatant might be urged to examine the basis for this abhorrence, to determine if the moral exigencies of war warrant such an ostensibly inhuman and dehumanizing act. Even combatants who deem the war necessary, justified, or unavoidable, may still find the experiences involved sufficiently horrific that the affective sensibilities cannot endure such an assault on their humanity. Here we see clearly that the problem is not with the affective system, but with reality itself. Few if any can endure the gross inhumanity of warfare without also experiencing some concomitant damage to the "self," and that affliction will be appropriately communicated to one's self-awareness through affective responses. It is doubtless for this reason that few combatants are inclined to share or rehearse their experiences. It is possible that over the course of time a soldier might unconsciously protect himself by becoming inured to the act of killing. Such concealment is not a long-term solution, but may result in the gradual dehumanization of the self and the subsequent inability of the combatant to live a "normal" life, at least not without experiencing affective disorders requiring long-term treatment.

Suppressing or denying the painful affective response to the combat experience is not, then, a healthy approach: the soldier may instead need to be helped to process and work through these emotions which are, in fact, accurately conveying a problem with wider reality. While palliation of this emotional pain may be entirely appropriate—at least on a short-term basis—it would not seem helpful or healthy to utilize such a response in an attempt to obliterate these appropriate responses, which are, after all, entirely warranted.

Understanding the Ghost in the Machine[8]

In the context of the above example, different theories of the human reality might seem largely a matter for philosophical musing. The reality of the

8 The term "ghost in the machine" was originated by philosopher Gilbert Ryle and acquired wider familiarity in Arthur Koestler's *The Ghost in the Machine*. Both men had as their principal objective the refutation of the theory articulated in Cartesian dualism that the mind and the body are distinct realities. The term "ghost" is thus used ironically by both men, who reject the idea that the mind or self is a metaphysical or spiritual reality that functions in association with the body-brain, and can survive the body's demise.

patient's condition would be the competent physician's concern, regardless of whether he or she possess a materialist or non-materialist worldview. In this sense, we do well to decide whether or not the *mizán* model derived from a Bahá'í view of the human reality provides some greater insight, or leads to a meaningful difference in approach when understood in its full metaphysical context.

On the one hand, whatever ultimately works or helps in a specific case does so regardless of the practitioner's view or understanding of the human reality. Indeed, in defiance of those elegant models of the scientific method that emphasize hypothesis testing, deductive reasoning, and the understanding of mechanism within well-articulated theory, many discoveries—in medicine as in other scientific pursuits—prove useful and come to be relied on long before the reason for their efficacy is discovered. Certainly the early stages in the evolution of mental health proceeded in such a manner. An obvious example is the aforementioned electroconvulsive therapy: it often works, but we still don't really understand precisely how or why.

And yet, on the other hand, there are at least two ways in which it does profoundly matter what model of human reality—metaphysical or material—prevails in the field of mental health. The first is systemic and relates to the trajectory of the field. While a given treatment or approach may be effective in isolation, regardless of the worldview of the practitioner who deploys it—and indeed, with the rise of AI and robotics, more and more treatments may over time be applied by machines that have no worldview whatsoever—the direction of the mental health field will be determined over time by the models of human nature that prevail within it. The questions asked, the lines of inquiry pursued, will vary depending on those models, as will the more ineffable matter of the posture the clinician adopts towards each patient, which, compounded over time and over thousands of interactions, can shape the global relationship between a population and the mental health profession.

Ultimately, scientific progress in a given area depends precisely on knowledge gained about the systems being examined. And if a human personality and the human affective systems are not merely bio-chemical constructs created by a very complex three pound mass of electrified meat—if the self and emotional indices to its well-being or status are not illusory creations after all, but metaphysical realities communicating through that physical transceiver—then the science of mental health must account for this aspect of human nature in order to advance along the most productive lines. The progress and efficacy of the field of mental health will be greatly affected by the extent to which the healers operating within it have the most accurate appreciation of that which they are trying to heal.

But the impact of the model of human reality is not only systemic and does not only reveal itself as the field

of mental health develops over time. The second way in which it matters is in the concrete implications it has for the treatment of specific cases. As we have noted, both the materialist mental health professional and the mental health professional who holds that the essential reality of the self is the human soul must both deal with the same symptoms and the same physiology. Therefore, what import do matters of personal belief on the part of the caregiver have with regard to diagnosis and treatment in relationship? How would it be beneficial to know whether the brain is the source of self and affect, or whether it is merely the intermediary device, the *mizán*?

Affect and the Essential Self

The consequences of this difference in perspective on affect and emotional pain are more significant than it might appear at first. If the paradigm of the self as a metaphysical essence and the brain as intermediary is a correct analysis of the human reality, then human problems related to affective conditions are necessarily involved in or related to the essential or spiritual self. Even in the case of a purely biophysical problem—a brain injury or other materially caused condition, for instance—the spiritual side of the matter should be considered, even if only to conclude that the dysfunction is posing an impediment to the metaphysical soul's ability to express itself with the physical body. Stated succinctly, no dysfunction in the body-brain, whether resulting from affective disorder or trauma, damages the soul or personhood itself, even as Bahá'u'lláh states axiomatically:

> Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments. Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal. Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness." (*Gleanings* 80:2)

This perspective can, in cases of irremediable physically-caused dysfunction, doubtless be a reassurance to the patient, and may even permit a perspective in which the challenges presented by the condition become an opportunity for a response—such as detachment, acceptance, acquiescence—responses that can provide an

avenue for spiritual progress. Whereas any such reassurance that might result in personal growth and development of the essential self would seem to be less available within a materialist framework, in which an irreversible loss of physical function could hardly be understood as being compensated for through spiritual growth. After all, if we firmly belief that the physical self is all that we are, then the diminishment of our senses and mental faculties will most probably induce in us a state of despair.

As for cases that are not purely matters of biophysical dysfunction, the spiritual perspective will have direct consequences for the treatment of the case itself. Most cases of affective problems or disorders fall in this category. Consequently, they are thus necessarily simultaneously "spiritual" problems, requiring some degree of concern for and utilization of a spiritually based remedy.

Let us consider a case in which a medical professional determines that the patient is suffering from clinical depression. The patient's quality of life is virtually non-existent, and the patient may be considering suicide. The doctor's first steps will be the same in either model. Some treatment must be immediately employed as a stop-gap measure—both to save the life of the patient and to allow the patient to become capable of participating in treatment and rehabilitation.

Once the symptoms of distress are sufficiently under control, then the professional's perspective on the fundamental nature of the human being may well lead to markedly different approaches. Investigating the patient's life circumstances and history, the healer may conclude that the patient has a fine life, a loving family and relationships, a worthwhile vocation to which they are dedicated, and, under normal circumstances, a healthy sense of self. In other words, the professional feels confident that there is no obvious discernible cause sufficient to account for the severity of the patient's distress.

The caregiver might thus understandably assume that, for whatever reason, the affective system itself is malfunctioning, that the depression is a result of a biochemical brain disorder that should be treated with anti-depressants to reset the *mizán* of the brain so that the patient experiences reality as it is and not as the biochemical feedback is causing the patient to experience it. Indeed, there are otherwise perfectly healthy people to whom this occurs, and in such cases we are back in the category of essentially physically-grounded dysfunction.

In other cases, it will be self-evident that the patient's depression does have a circumstantial cause, or at least a partial one. They may be able to articulate this clearly by themselves—they feel trapped in a painful relationship dynamic, feel disempowered and unfilled professionally, or feel guilt from some as yet unresolved and incompletely understood interaction from the past. It may then be the healer's task to uncover the relevant circumstances and help the patient recognize what it

is that is driving the depression. Once the source of this affective problem becomes apparent and is agreed upon by both patient and professional, the latter's role is to provide strategies, tools, and frameworks to help the patient either begin to change whatever of the circumstance it is in their power to change, or to reframe their relationship to or response to whatever cannot be changed so as to enable the patient break free from the hold that the unalterable circumstances have had on the patient's emotions and which have been fostering the depression.

But if the fundamental nature of the human being is spiritual—if each of us is a metaphysical essence that progresses, or does not, based on its adherence to spiritual laws—then we should also expect that a great deal of dissatisfaction, distress, and affective disorder will manifest in people when their lives here on earth run counter to the dictates of these laws—which are, after all, not random mandates, but descriptions of how we can best relate to reality. Thus, it can be usefully observed from such a perspective that we do not so much "break" a moral law, as we "break ourselves" on the moral law, because the law describes the best path for our happiness and advancement, as well as the effects we incur if we stray from that path.

Clearly, then, this unfortunate result will occur *even if* the person's own framework for understanding reality does not include a belief in the spiritual nature of the essential self or in the existence of inviolable laws that accurately describe the healthiest course of action for any given set of circumstances. If we commit injustice, we will reap the consequences of that inappropriate or morally wrong action. We will not necessarily experience some immediate or obvious karmic retribution. Instead, as Socrates explains in great detail in the dialogue *The Gorgias*, by committing injustice, we are doing more harm to ourselves, to our spiritual wellbeing, than we are doing to those to whom we have been unjust.

Of course, we might think to excuse someone who is oblivious to these laws, who has not had the benefit of a "spiritual" education. And yet the Bahá'í writings assert that awareness of spiritual principles and laws at work in the world is ultimately accessible to anyone who is sincerely examining themselves and reality itself. After all, as we have noted, the Bahá'í theory of the self is that we are essentially spiritual beings, and as emanations from the spiritual realm, we are inherently attracted to the spiritual or virtuous nature that is infused into the entirety of creation.

Clearly, none of us has the right or the capacity to assess the spiritual condition of another soul or to determine at what point that soul becomes responsible for having discerned the spiritual lessons underlying their experience in physical reality and the complexity of all their relations to it. This is especially true in the context of a contemporary social environment that has become so entirely moribund morally. There is certainly no shortage of societal and

environmental forces contributing to our remoteness from our essentially spiritual nature—a state which will necessarily, inevitably, and inexorably incline us towards dissatisfaction, addictive behaviors, base appetites, and dysfunctional or dissatisfying human relationships. In such a milieu, a patient may be suffering the consequence of such forces without realizing the actual source of discomfiture or affective affliction.

And here the perspective of the healer regarding the true nature of the "self" can make a great deal of difference. A materialist physician may genuinely desire the best for their patients, and subsequently approach their role as trying to facilitate a realization of the life that the patient most eagerly desires to lead. But if neither patient nor healer has an awareness of the metaphysical self or the tension between the spiritual and material aspects of reality that is promulgating the affective condition, then the prescribed remedy may totally fail to address the problem.

True, some palliative responses may succeed in helping the patient manage emotions for a time by employing cognitive, behavioral, or pharmacological tools that impact how emotions arise or how reality is perceived. Such assistance may also help the patient move towards a life more in line with what they want for themselves. But because the affective system designed to keep us in touch with reality has effectively been rendered inaccurate or its feedback about our relation to reality misrepresented (that is, reality as it actually exists, not the illusion of reality we are proffered by society), then true healing, long-term healing, will most probably not take place because the actual cause of the condition has been essentially misunderstood.

Granted, it might be the case in some instances that the temporary alleviation of discomfiture by palliative methods will enable the patient sufficient peace of mind that pursuit of the deeper truth underlying the health of the essential self becomes easier to undertake. The distraction of the affective affliction, once removed, may allow for a more well-considered examination of the self, its true nature, and it relationship to spiritual reality.

Affect and Moral Perspective

Generations of readers and audiences have grappled with the meaning of Greek tragedy. Particularly perplexing is the problem of how individual tragic heroes can be held accountable for their perverse acts when they are "fated" to fail, or else have inherited perverse inclinations towards the tragic actions that bring about their own downfall.

Œdipus, of course, is the paradigmatic tragic hero, with *Œdipus Rex* cited by Aristotle in the *Poetics* as best exemplifying the tragic genre. And yet the obvious question arises in this esteemed work as to how Œdipus can be held accountable for killing his father when he was "fated" to do so and took every precaution against such a possible outcome by leaving the land

in which he believed his father dwelt? The answer is that while Œdipus was careful not to kill anyone identified as his father, he was not sufficiently in control of his emotions that he could restrain himself from killing an apparent stranger—later revealed to be his father—in a fit of rage. In short, Œdipus' fault lies in his failure to exercise sufficient will to control his temper—regardless of whom he might be killing—rather than in some willful act of patricide.

One of my favorite examples of this same classical concept of a tragic flaw that results in the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine is Racine's 1677 Neo-Classical French play *Phédre*. In drawing on Euripides' play *Hyppolytus*, Racine's work portrays the ill-fated passion of Phaedra for her stepson Hyppolytus. Having inherited her familial inclination for inappropriate passion (resulting from Venus' curse, which also caused Phaedra's mother Pasiphae to fall in love with a bull), Phaedra is, like Œdipus, stricken with an affective disorder beyond her willful control.

Here, too, one might reasonably ask what is her tragic flaw, her sin, her culpability in all this. The answer here is likewise simple enough to understand. While she could not avoid the curse of having the "unnatural" passion, she clearly did have sufficient free will and willpower not to respond to her base passion. Thus, she "chose" not to exercise that restraint—and choice (free will) is critical to all notions of a tragic failure.

This is not to say that passion and infatuation are not real and powerful and difficult to control. And in contemporary society where there are no shared values about what is moral and what is immoral, the guidance, even among many mental health professionals, is liable to be that we should do whatever feels "natural." In such a context, that which is "right" becomes equated with whatever makes us comfortable. True, this maxim sometimes includes the quasi moral caveat that we should do what "feels good" so long as we do not hurt others. But what about our moral obligation not to hurt ourselves? What if what feels right is not ultimately what helps us succeed in our inherent task of becoming good people?

We might well argue that any shared sense of morality as regards our obligations to others would dictate that we give due consideration to others' affective well-being and, in some cases, even give precedence to it over our own affective sense of self. We might further argue that foregoing doing what feels affectively "comfortable" (or even "natural" in some sense) and doing, instead, what would ultimately bring about the greatest good, is more likely, in the long-term reality of our own existence, to aid our own spiritual development. Stated in the context of our obligation to assist in creating a healthy society, our consideration of what temporarily feels good or satisfying in the moment should be secondary when weighed against what course of action will best serve the human

condition as a whole, both by the example of our personal comportment and by our individual contribution to the construction of moral order.

Indeed, the sense or knowledge of "self" that Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to attain in this life, as a primary and necessary requisite to preparing ourselves for the continuation of our lives beyond the associative relationship with the body, transcends what may be temporarily satisfying or comfortable. Certainly, those who willingly and in full knowledge sacrifice their lives for an abstract concept of freedom and justice for others are not following a path that is always emotionally comfortable.[9] It is in this sense that the strict materialist view of emotion and of the psyche or self fails us in describing our personal reality and the proper function of emotion in assisting us to understand and develop the self.

For however much we may, in many instances, be almost entirely blameless for the difficult affective/social/psychical situations in which we find ourselves, how we respond to our anguish and existential plight is within our power to control. It is in this sense that the mental health professional has one of the most weighty and challenging tasks among all those in the healing arts—to help human beings recognize the reality of the self and to assist all those in their care to come to terms with the eternal objective of the essential self, rather than to strive to become placated by readily available and socially touted short-term but deleterious responses to depression, guilt, and grief; to the "heartache and the thousand natural shocks/ That flesh is heir to" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, I, ll 62-63).

The instant "fix" may be easier to achieve and ostensibly more comforting for both healer and patient, but even though some immediate response may be called for to help a patient endure in the present, clearly the greatest gift the healer can provide is to help bestow that knowledge of self that enables and empowers one to progress eternally. This is the *mizán* that endures, the robe of justice that adorns reality as a whole, in both its physical and its metaphysical dimensions.

This knowledge of the intended order of things, the reality underlying and vivifying this mortal coil, is so essential that without it, or without our compliance with that order's unseen but nonetheless operative laws, we risk chaos or doom. As Ulysses remarks in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* concerning "degree"—the divine laws and order governing reality:

9 In my own discussion of the social dimension of any attempt at personal spiritual ascent in *The Ascent of Society: The Social Imperative in Personal Salvation*, I examine in detail the necessity of integrating our affective sense of self-worth and self-satisfaction with the larger and more inclusive expressions of "self" that can only derive from relationships with others, whether at the level of the family, the community, or, ultimately, humankind as a whole.

Take but degree away, untune that string,
And, hark! what discord follows; each thing meets.
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe. (I, iii, ll 109-111)

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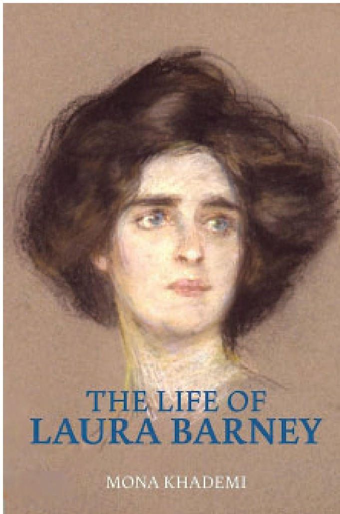
Book Review



The Life of Laura Barney by Mona Khademi, George Ronald Publisher, 2022, xxii + 399 pages, including epilogue, index, appendixes and abbreviations.

J.A. MCLEAN

Author Mona Khademi's interest in Laura Barney was unsuspectingly awakened in the year 2000, when she learned that Studio House, Barney's former home in Washington, D.C., was being sold and its contents auctioned off. She later learned that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had visited Studio House at least three times during His historic tour of Canada and the United States in 1912. Ms. Khademi's attendance at the auction turned out to be providential: though initially prompted by simple curiosity, the visit sowed the seeds for the genesis of her noteworthy book. Her research began then and continued systematically over the next twenty-one years, until it finally produced what can probably be considered the definitive biography of Laura Barney.[1]

On the evidence, Laura Dreyfus-Barney, the subject of Mona Khademi's copious and finely detailed biography, deserves to rank among the most eminent of all western Bahá'ís of her generation. Members of the Bahá'í community remember Laura Barney as the compiler and first translator of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Some Answered Questions*, published in London in 1908—a book described by Shoghi Effendi as an "imperishable service" (*God Passes By* 260).

Beyond that basic information, until Ms. Khademi's book appeared during the summer of 2022, most informed Bahá'ís were aware of only a few other basic facts of Laura Barney's life: she was an American expatriate who lived in France; she married Hippolyte Dreyfus, a lawyer and oriental scholar who was the first Frenchman to become a Bahá'í; her mother Alice Pike Barney was an accomplished painter.

As for so many others who met 'Abdu'l-Bahá and who became His devoted followers, Barney's life was changed forever by their meeting. Laura made her first pilgrimage in October 1900, after learning of the Bahá'í Faith

1 It should be noted that after her marriage in 1911 to Hippolyte Dreyfus, the erstwhile Laura Clifford Barney preferred joining her married to her maiden name, just as her husband Hippolyte also favoured the double-name Dreyfus-Barney in recognition of his wife. For simplicity's sake, however, the author chose to refer to Laura by her maiden name in the book's title.

from May Bolles (later Maxwell) in Paris during the same year. In her letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Laura wrote that she wanted to meet Him before accepting the Bahá'í teachings.

Barney describes in telling words the alchemical transformation produced by her first meeting with her "Master." I direct the reader to Mona Khademi's full report of this transformative moment, in which Barney, as the tears ran down her cheeks, felt as if she was being liberated from a dark prison, after being locked up for years (34). This sudden and profound change in the young Laura Barney was to have lasting consequences throughout the rest of her long life, for she was destined to become not only an historical, eminent Bahá'í, but also a committed humanitarian who was singularly praised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for her rare intellectual and spiritual attributes. This distinguished woman became, in fact, one of only a few ever to be honoured with the title of "Amatu'l-Bahá" (Handmaid of Bahá) by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself (69)

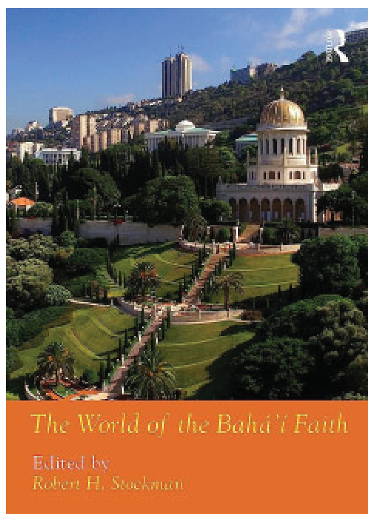
One of the many sub-themes included in Khademi's book is the somewhat complex relationship between Laura and her older sister Natalie, an influential benefactor and supporter of arts and literature, as well as a significant feminist and queer literary figure in her own right. The author notes that during their long relationship, it was Laura who had always striven to maintain their sisterhood on the friendliest possible terms. It is significant that Laura chose to be buried together with Natalie.

Khademi's book makes readers more fully aware of how Laura Barney demonstrated her spiritual beliefs in active social service. This gifted and accomplished woman believed that her spiritual commitment to the Bahá'í Faith—a commitment that was intimately tied to the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá—should be expressed in and fulfilled by the various humanitarian causes that she espoused. These causes came to occupy the centre of her life even more after the premature death of her husband Hippolyte. As close and harmonious companions, they had been married happily for seventeen years.

The various contributions of Laura Barney to the wider community were perhaps just as significant as the main contribution for which she is best known by Bahá'ís. In non-Bahá'í society, although we cannot say that she was famous in the worldly sense, Laura came to public attention as philanthropist, war-relief worker, peace-advocate, promoter of women's rights, arts educator, author and sculptor—to name only a few. The reader will be impressed with a list, first printed in *Who's Who in America* and reproduced by the author in Appendix B, of the committees and organizations that Barney either founded, promoted, or financially supported.

The Life of Laura Barney succeeds remarkably well in informing readers that the Bahá'í who was known mainly for producing the book *Some Answered Questions* was a far more accomplished and distinguished woman than most Bahá'ís ever suspected. Mona Khademi could not have chosen a more worthy subject for her investigation.

Book Review



The World of the Bahá'í Faith, edited by Robert H. Stockman. Routledge, 2021, 666 pages.

MICHAEL SABET

The World of the Bahá'í Faith is a recent publication in the "Routledge Worlds" series of scholarly guides to world religions. The book is aimed at "students and scholars studying world religions and comparative religion" (i), and in keeping with its mandate as a reference book, the contributions in the volume provide an accessible and remarkably thorough overview of what has already been mapped out in Bahá'í primary and secondary sources on a wide range of topics. Yet the book goes beyond consolidation, with many authors providing novel perspectives and fresh analytical approaches to their subject matter. Every reader is sure to derive new insights from their engagement with this collection.

The introduction by editor Robert H. Stockman frames the work as an overview of a religion in motion, one whose purpose and direction are elaborated over time as the successive leaders of the Bahá'í community find it progressively able to take on the next stage in the program embedded in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. This is a helpful framing, even for chapters covering topics that might seem inherently static, such as those dealing with core features of philosophy or doctrine, or periods of history now past. The significance and implications of even these topics are revealed progressively over time, as the community accumulates more experience in whose light to better appraise them.

The World of the Bahá'í Faith surveys a broad range of topics. There is inevitably some overlap between chapters, given the impossibility of perfectly carving up into discrete conceptual segments a phenomenon like a world religion, whose scripture, community life (both global and local), philosophy, engagement with the outside world, and capacity to transform the individual, are all inextricable facets of a whole. The textbook is divided into six parts. A first part, "Leadership and Authoritative texts," devotes a chapter to each of the Central Figures, the Guardian, and the Universal House of Justice, with a corresponding chapter on the writings of each. The second part, "Theology," deals with the core distinctive Bahá'í teachings on God and the interaction between the

divine and humanity, but also with interfaith relations and the harmony of science and religion. The next section, "Humanity," acts as a bridge between philosophical topics and areas of practical concern; it discusses the Bahá'í understanding of the nature of the human being, spirituality and the soul, but also explores the implications of the human's spiritual reality for unity in diversity within the social realm. The fourth section, "Society," considers the Faith's relationship to such aspects of humanity's collective life as art, economics, education, family, and work. "The Contemporary Bahá'í Community" explores Bahá'í concepts that structure community life, from long-standing features whose implications continue to be developed—such as the Covenant and the Administrative Order, consultation, and devotional life—to topics of intensive learning in the contemporary community, such as constructive agency and a culture of learning. There is also a chapter devoted to the history of the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran, which acts as a bridge to the final part, "History and spread of the Bahá'í community," containing region-specific histories of the Bahá'í Faith as well as demographic details. The "References and Further Reading" sections in all the chapters, and in particular these final chapters on regional histories, are a rich resource for further study. The regional chapters inevitably focus more on broad trends than details, aiming as they do to tell the story of the Bahá'í experience in vast territories over many decades of time, and Stockman notes that a hoped-for chapter on the "long and remarkable—and little researched" history of the Faith in the territories of the former Soviet Union never materialized (xvii). We echo the hope he expresses that this volume may inspire further research into the many areas which these overview chapters can, of necessity, only briefly allude to.

It is a strength of the multichapter format that it brings together contributions from a wide range of authors, many of whom are drawing on their own extensive scholarship in a particular area. This not only allows readers to benefit from a broad range of expertise; it also provides them with a set of complementary perspectives and approaches. The strength of this diversity of approaches is exemplified by the chapters on the Writings of the Central Figures, the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. Nader Saiedi's discussion of the Writings of the Báb is a primarily thematic overview, which acts as a wonderfully accessible abridgement of his more expansive scholarship on the topic in *Gate of the Heart*, and could easily be recommended as preliminary reading to anyone approaching that work for the first time. Conversely, Steven Phelps' article on the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh takes a dramatically different, though equally valuable, approach; after a brief discussion of overall content and style, it embarks on something similar to Adib Taherzadeh's *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, providing a synopsis of many of Bahá'u'lláh's most important Writings—including

many untranslated works that are little known amongst non-Persian Bahá'ís—categorized by the period in which they were revealed. If the discussion of the context and content of the works is necessarily far briefer than in Taherzadeh's four volume opus, the range of works covered may actually be greater, and gives the reader an appreciation of the stunning volume and breadth of Bahá'u'lláh's literary output. In their chapters on the Writings and utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the English-language writings of Shoghi Effendi respectively, Mina Yazdani and Sandra Lynn Hutchinson adopt almost a synthesis of the two approaches just described: a smaller number of major texts are examined in depth and thematically analyzed. Each approach is of great value on its own terms, and is well tailored to the distinct nature of each literary corpus.

A variety of approaches are taken in the rest of the volume as well. Certain chapters on philosophical topics are essentially summaries of a Bahá'í position; similarly, some of the chapters focusing on how Bahá'í concepts inform practice (in education, for example) seek to discern and articulate a conceptual framework, rooted in the writings and guidance and informed by collective experience, within which to treat their subject. Other chapters, dealing with either the philosophical or the practical, go beyond presenting a Bahá'í understanding of the subject matter, and seek to contextualize such an understanding within broader scholarship and experience. The practice-centric chapters on "Constructive Resilience" and "A Culture of Learning" do this, for instance, by drawing on Gandhian social action and the philosophy of science respectively; but so does the essentially philosophical chapter on "Progressive Revelation," which correlates this core Bahá'í teaching with certain other philosophical and religious understandings of the role of religion in history. This comparative approach is valuable where present, particularly when it is used to highlight the kinds of questions or problems which the Bahá'í position seems well suited to address. Todd Smith and Omid Ghaemmaghami, for instance, frame their chapter on "Consultation" by exploring certain deficiencies in prevalent modes of communication, which gives the topic an urgency and immediacy that will appeal to the student learning about Bahá'í consultation for the first time. In some chapters, this kind of framing risks overwhelming the discussion of the Bahá'í position itself; Augusto Lopez-Claros' chapter on "Economics," for example, is perhaps a better example of how someone working from a Bahá'í position might make a contribution to wider discourses, than of how one might present the Bahá'í position specifically. However, as in the chapter on consultation, the incisive diagnosis of the economic and ecological situation humanity faces today crystallizes the importance of considering what a Bahá'í contribution in this area might be.

The comparative approach is not the only viable one, of course, and some

of the strongest contributions take a different tack. The chapter on "Science and Religion" by Steven Phelps is a case in point. Engaging with the wider scholarship on this topic in anything more than a cursory manner would be impossible in a short chapter; instead, the author focuses on carefully articulating the underlying philosophical foundations of a principle with which most Bahá'ís are familiar, but whose coherence with fundamental Bahá'í conceptions of ontology and epistemology may not often be consciously considered.

It would have been helpful for the sections on the history of the Faith to include some discussion of their approach to sources. The accounts typically adhere to the versions of events familiar to Bahá'ís. There are other accounts of these events that present matters differently; in places these accounts are alluded to, but not often on points where they differ from the "canonical" Bahá'í account. In this reviewer's opinion, the choice here is certainly justifiable, but the justification might have been made explicit given the intended general audience. Peter Smith's article on "The History of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths" deals with this issue particularly effectively. Drawing on his earlier scholarship in the field, the author canvasses the range of perspectives on the meaning of events in Bábí history—were the besieged at Fort Tabarsi revolutionaries, or willing martyrs?—in a way that is particularly valuable in the study of history, where the impossibility of reading the hearts and intentions of the actors means that no matter whose version of a story one accepts, one is making a statement of faith (in one source over another, if nothing else). Smith deftly places a range of interpretations before the reader. This occurs in some of the other chapters dealing with history, but not as consistently; in these, a brief explanation of which sources are being considered would have been welcome.

However, with this quibble aside, and given the enormous potential for complexity in presenting detailed histories of the Faith, the historical chapters do an admirable job of providing a clear narrative for the student, preserving essentials while avoiding getting bogged down in too many unfamiliar names.

The discussion of sources leads into a broader question that a student might ask about the volume. It presents an essentially "insider" view of the Bahá'í Faith; the religion's teachings and practices are explained on their own terms, by scholars who are also members of the community. There is no sustained effort to interrogate the Bahá'í Faith from an outsider or critical perspective. Someone approaching the study of the Faith for the first time might wonder whether this risks presenting a one-sided view of the religion, one that obscures controversies and critical challenges.

The "insider" perspective is, in my view, the correct one for this volume, for reasons both practical and conceptual. As a preliminary point, the authors in this volume are subject matter

experts, which is of course the primary consideration in creating a reference work; it would be difficult to find more qualified contributors. From a practical perspective, while there are certainly reputable scholars of the Faith who are not Bahá'ís themselves, many of the facets of the Faith as a dynamic religious movement would be difficult to comment on from an outside perspective. At some point, sociologists may take a sustained interest in Bahá'í community building processes, for instance, making a contribution by someone outside the community on this topic perfectly feasible; as it stands, however, those best placed to provide an accurate and detailed explanation of these processes will most often be, if not Bahá'ís themselves, those actively involved in Bahá'í-inspired community activities.

This connects to a broader point about voice. It is important for any student of the Bahá'í Faith—particularly a novice to the topic—to understand the Faith as a living religious tradition on its own terms. This is well understood in fields like anthropology, where the aspiration to an "objectivity" in which outsiders study a population as though they themselves are socially unconditioned—or perhaps belong to a perfect cultural standard against which others can be measured (a legacy of thinkers as diverse as Hegel and J.S. Mill)—has long since been abandoned. Today, the voices and perspectives of those who represent the group being studied are privileged. In an age of postmodern sensibilities, where respect for religion is often based more on its importance to culture than in any acknowledgement of its possible connection to an ontologically transcendent reality, the Bahá'í Faith may at first glance appear less worthy of such deference to its own subjective voice than some other traditions. Can a community as new, as diverse, and as global as this claim to have a culture in the same sense as traditions that are far older and more rooted in a particular set of linguistic, ethnic, or geographic contexts? The Bahá'ís, of course, would say yes—and the support for that claim would be the very kinds of social phenomena documented by participant observers in this volume. But the question of voice goes deeper than respecting the subjective viewpoint of the members of a community simply because it *is* their viewpoint; it has an epistemological dimension as well. As Michael Karlberg and Todd Smith suggest in their chapter on "A Culture of Learning," there are kinds of experiential knowledge that can only be fully acquired through participation. If any access to such knowledge is to be achieved through the mere reading of a text, then the text itself must reflect participants' voices:

> a common vocabulary is also emerging that enables growing numbers of people to benefit from accumulated knowledge, progressively clarify concepts, and share emerging insights. Indeed, much of the vocabulary cited in the preceding discussion is rich with meanings that can only be fully

> grasped by participating in processes of collective study, practical application, and experiential learning—similar to the way a common vocabulary is articulated and takes on meaning in a scientific field of enquiry. (470)

And of course, the importance of experiential knowledge is not restricted to participatory activities such as community building; it emerges as well in individual spiritual practices such as prayer.

This is not to deny that an outside perspective has its own value; this perspective may access a different knowledge that is less accessible from within the community. But where such a perspective approaches foundational truth claims from a position of skepticism, as is common in the academic study of religion, there is a risk—particularly in an introductory study—that it will derail the student from understanding the religion on its own terms. Skepticism, like faith, is a kind of bias: it says "not until you prove it," but too often enters the field with a fixed idea about what constitutes a valid standard of proof. *The World of the Bahá'í Faith* presents the student of religion with a coherent, sustained, and cross-disciplinary understanding of not only a body of information about the Bahá'í Faith, and the concepts that structure that information, but the underlying commitments that give the Faith life in the hearts of its followers—the place where, in the final analysis, true religion is ultimately found.

The World of the Bahá'í Faith is available as hardcover and e-book, with a paperback edition to be released later in 2023.

Biographical Notes

GERALD FILSON has been a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada for eight years after serving as the Director of External Affairs for twenty-five years. He has a PhD in Philosophy of Education from the University of Toronto, an MA in Educational Technology from Concordia and a BA degree in Mathematics from the University of Saskathewan. He pioneered to les Iles de la Madeleine for six years in his twenties.

JOHN S. HATCHER is Professor Emeritus in English literature at the University of South Florida in Tampa where he taught for forty years. He is a poet, lecturer, translator, and author, having published twenty-five books, some of which have been translated into multiple languages. His most recent book is *The Body of God: A Reader's Guide to Bahá'u'lláh's Súrih of the Temple* (Bahá'í Studies Publishing, 2022). He was editor of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* for seven years, and has been a guest lecturer at various distinguished universities. He received various awards for his work, including the Hasan Balyuzi Lectureship. www.johnshatcher.com

MICHÈLE JUBILEE: I make art about the body and the soul, our relationships to ourselves and each other, and our unique journeys of growth as human beings. I explore these themes through symbols of the human body and nature, and in many mediums. I gravitate towards illustrative drawings and paintings, which to me, convey a story that explores a spiritual state, or the worlds in our minds that we keep hidden or hold close.

J. A. (JACK) MCLEAN (b. Toronto 1945) is an independent scholar, poet, and essayist living in Ottawa, Ontario. He has published five books in the fields of Bahá'í theology, spirituality, and biography. In 2013, his 606-page literary-critical and theological work on the writings of Shoghi Effendi, *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*, won the distinguished scholarship award from the Association for Bahá'í Studies of North America. In 1995, he also won the creative writing award from the same association. He is currently completing a commentary on The Seven Valleys. He has written some thirty academic papers in the fields of Bahá'í theology, mysticism, and philosophical theology. Mr. McLean was fortunate enough to have met and interviewed Laura Dreyfus-Barney in Paris in 1967, when she was eighty-eight years old and he was a young student. See www.jack-mclean.com.

DR JUNE PAISA PERKINS, a multi-arts creative, born to a Papua New Guinean Indigenous mother and Australian father, combines poetry, blogging, photography, and story to explore: peace, ecology, spirituality, cultural diversity, healing from natural

disasters, and empowerment. Recently she guest-edited *Diaspora WQ 275* for the Queensland Writing Centre. Her works have been published by *Tokens*, *World Order*, *The Queensland Art Gallery*, *Nineteen Months*, *South of the Sun*, and several anthologies including Red Room Poetry's, *In Your Hands*. She has published two collections of poetry, *Illuminations*, *19 poems and one story* (2020), and for children and families *Magic Fish Dreaming* (2016). www.gumbootspearlz.org